

# Sam meets Ambassador Yang in Lisbon

## Yang praises Macau's 'outstanding achievements'

Tony Wong

Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai, who is on a working visit in Portugal, met with the Chinese Ambassador to Portugal, Yang Yirui, in Lisbon at noon yesterday (local time), where they exchanged views on topics such as supporting Macau in continuously deepening its exchanges and cooperation with Portugal across multiple fields, and better leveraging Macau's role as a service platform between China and Portuguese-speaking countries so as to make its own contributions to the national development, according to a statement released by the Macau Government Information Bureau (GCS) in the early hours of today (Macau time).

According to the statement, Sam noted during the meeting that Portugal is the first stop of the current-term MSAR government's first official foreign trip, which is of great significance.

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, April 26.

According to the GCS statement, Sam underlined during the meeting at the ambassador's official residence that the visit to Portugal aims to put into practice the spirit of President Xi Jinping's important speeches made during his inspection visit to Macau in December 2024 and to



Macau Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai (left) shakes hands with Chinese Ambassador to Portugal Yang Yirui on the sidelines of their meeting in Lisbon at noon yesterday (local time). - Photo: GCS

implement the important consensus for cooperation reached by the heads of state of China and Portugal.

Sam also noted that the visit also aims to show the international community the achievements of Macau's successful implementation of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle since its return to the motherland on December 20,

1999, to promote the development opportunities of Macau and Hengqin, and to better leverage Macau's role as a cooperation service platform between China and Portuguese-speaking countries, as well as its important role as a bridgehead for the country's opening up to the outside world.

According to the statement,

Yang said during the meeting that this first overseas visit by the current-term MSAR government is large-scale and high-profile, and is expected to achieve fruitful results. Macau and Portugal share a unique historical connection and a solid foundation for good cooperation, Yang said, adding that Sam's visit to Portugal is of great significance to

the ongoing advancement of sound China-Portugal cooperation.

Yang also praised the "outstanding achievements" of Macau's successful implementation of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle, adding that he expects Macau to continue to play a proactive role in making contributions to further strengthening China-Portugal relations.

### Sam meets Macau students in Portugal, raising 3 expectations

Meanwhile, on Saturday night (local time), Sam met in Lisbon with about 110 Macau students studying in Portugal, underlining that the MSAR government will continue to support the studies and development of Macau students in Portugal.

According to a statement released by the Macau Government Information Bureau (GCS) yesterday afternoon (Macau time), Sam said he expects Macau students studying in Portugal to, after completing their studies, return to Macau in order to fully utilise their talents, contributing their wisdom and strength to the development of the nation and Macau.

According to the statement, most of the about 110 students are studying either law, translation, Portuguese language studies, or management, with others studying sports science, medicine, artificial intelligence (AI) and data science, mechanical engineering, economics, and architecture, among others.

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## 8 children killed in US shooting spree: police

WASHINGTON, DC – Eight children were killed in a shooting spree early yesterday (local time) in the southern US state of Louisiana, in what police said appears to have been an incident of domestic violence.

The gunman, who was not immediately identified, was fatally

shot by police after a car chase, officials said.

The incident took place in the city of Shreveport, in northwestern Louisiana.

"This is a rather extensive crime scene spanning between two residences," police Corporal Chris Bordelon told a press conference,

adding that a third residence was also part of the scene being combed by investigators.

The victims ranged in age from one to 14, Bordelon said.

"Some of the children inside were his descendants," he added.

Two other people were struck by gunfire, but their conditions

were not immediately known.

The suspect carjacked a vehicle and led police on a chase before officers opened fire and the assailant was killed.

"We do believe him to be the only individual that fired gunshots at these locations," Bordelon said, calling the incident a "domestic disturbance."

The United States, where firearms are readily available, is a frequent scene of gun violence, with thousands of people killed every year.

"It's a terrible morning in Shreveport and we all mourn with the victims," Mayor Tom Arceneaux said at the press conference. - AFP

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### China's consumer shift: not just importing, but integrating global supply chains

The sixth China International Consumer Products Expo (CICPE) concluded on Saturday in Haikou, capital of Hainan Province.

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### Vance will lead US team to Iran talks in Pakistan: White House

US Vice President JD Vance will lead the US delegation for talks with Iran in Pakistan, a White House official said yesterday – shortly after President Donald Trump said he would not make the trip.

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### China-Mozambique cooperation delivers steady gains for development

Marking the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership in 2026, China and Mozambique are seeing tangible progress in infrastructure, trade, and people-to-people exchanges.

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# Macao and the New Strategic Horizons of the Macao SAR

Commentary by Manuel Silvério\*

Between health, youth, international cooperation and sport, the Macao SAR can turn the current context into a new cycle of opportunity and strategic relevance.

## Signs of stability

### *A changing regional context and a strategy of continuity*

While many analysts see China gaining a structural advantage globally and regionally – irrespective of the challenges posed by the Taiwan issue – recent developments demand closer scrutiny.

What we are seeing is not a linear reality, but a complex picture in which different levels of analysis coexist and do not always move in the same direction.

If an initial reading of recent events highlighted a sequence of signals of stability and external projection on China's part, a second reading reveals something more structured: the construction of concrete instruments of influence, capable of operating progressively across the economic, social and institutional spheres.

The 10 measures announced by Beijing at the end of the visit by Cheng Li-wun, chairwoman of the Kuomintang (KMT), should be understood in that framework. They include stronger political dialogue, the promotion of youth exchanges, the resumption of direct flights, the gradual reopening of tourism, deeper infrastructure links with Jinmen (Kinmen and Matsu), logistical facilitation, support for agricultural and fisheries trade, the opening of cultural content, broader economic cooperation and, as a political foundation, the reaffirmation of the "1992 Consensus" and opposition to independence.

More than a set of isolated measures, this is an architecture of gradual rapprochement. Its logic is clear: to act where political decisions are formed, through mobility, economics, human contact and the building of trust. It is a long-term strategy, not aimed at immediate results, but at gradually shaping the space in which decisions are made.

## Macao's place

### *Between national strategy and regional application*

It is in this context that Macao can, and should, reposition itself.

The Macao SAR does not take part directly in the political equation of the Taiwan Strait. Yet it is increasingly involved in the broader model of opening-up and external linkage that China is developing. It is precisely in that intermediate space, between strategy and implementation, that Macao can gain relevance.

Recent diplomatic movement also deserves closer attention here. The succession of visits by European leaders to Beijing, sometimes extending to Macao, together with Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai's current visit to Europe, confirms that this movement is already under way. It is within this framework that one should read the visit by Portuguese Prime Minister Luís Montenegro to Beijing and Macao, the visit by the President of the Portuguese Parliament to China, including Macao, the visit by Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez to Beijing, and Sam's visit to Portugal and Spain, with further stops in Geneva and Brussels. Taken together, these contacts suggest an expansion in the scale of relations between China and Europe, including Macao, reinforcing the idea that the MSAR can play a more active role as a platform for linkage, contact and articulation.

This dynamic was further reinforced in Macao by recently hosting the 43<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly of the Union of Portuguese-Speaking Capital Cities (UCCLA), accompanied by high-level institutional meetings and by the election of the Macao SAR to the presidency of the Executive Committee for the 2026-2028 term. More than a protocol event, this confirms the continuing relevance of a vocation that Macao has cultivated with consistency: that of a platform for contact, cooperation and articulation between China and the Portuguese-speaking world. The fact that the assembly also included visits to the Commercial and Trade Co-operation Service Platform between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries as well as to the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin reinforces that reading still further.

In this context, Macao is not merely a place one passes through. It can become a point of articulation.

That singularity also has a practical expression which should not be underestimated. In the sporting world, China; Hong Kong, China; Macao, China; and Chinese Taipei take part in a range of international events and structures, and all four are full members of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA). Yet the importance of this goes beyond sport itself. It shows that there are concrete spaces of contact, representation and cooperation in which different institutional models can coexist in functional terms. It is precisely this accumulated experience of differentiated participation that can be better used in areas such as health, science, training, youth, and technical cooperation.

This reading becomes even more significant when viewed from a long-term perspective. The point is not to question the current phase of "One Country, Two Systems", but to recognise that Hong Kong and Macao are moving towards important milestones within that framework, which requires vision, continuity and capacity for adaptation. That preparation, however, should not be seen merely in terms of the calendar. It should be understood, above all, as part of a strategy aimed at raising the quality of life, strengthening public well-being, valuing local professionals, creating new skilled jobs, and developing essential areas such as health, training, and sport.

## Health, sport and opportunity

### *Two areas in which ambition can take concrete shape*

Health is a prime example of this opportunity. Previously, external cooperation was framed narrowly—often limited to the occasional recruitment of doctors. Such an approach is no longer sufficient given the possibilities now available.

Taiwan has a highly developed public and private healthcare system with strong international recognition, particularly in medical technology, hospital management and clinical research. The Chinese mainland, for its part, offers scale, resources, integrative capacity and an institutional and infrastructural base that cannot be ignored. Portugal offers a medical and academic tradition with which Macao retains deep affinities. The articulation of these three spaces – the Chinese mainland, China's Taiwan region and Portugal – could give rise to a new structured axis of cooperation, with Macao in a position to connect and to lead.

Within this framework, Macao's Islands Healthcare Complex, The Islands Healthcare Complex – Macao Medical Centre of Peking Union Medical College Hospital, also known as Macao Hospital Macao, can play a central

role. Its management by Peking Union Medical College Hospital gives it a solid institutional base, and its full operational development, in coordination with the University of Macau (UM) and with research and training networks, could turn the MSAR into a regional hub for medical science, clinical innovation, and academic cooperation.

It is also in this context that the Asian Beach Games in Sanya should be understood. After successive postponements, their return was used by China and the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) as a showcase of stability, openness and organisational capacity. More than replicating that model, the lesson for Macao may lie in the way different sectors can themselves be used as instruments of projection, qualification and public usefulness.

Sport, too, should be thought about beyond competition and visibility. In articulation with health, training and research, it can create new opportunities for young people, improve residents' well-being and make better use of existing infrastructure. In that sense, the proximity between the new Sports Medicine Centre of the Sports Bureau (ID) and the Islands Healthcare Complex suggests a concrete possibility: to develop in Macao an integrated space for preparation, rehabilitation, sports medicine, technical training, and university cooperation.

Given Macao's scale and the inevitably small number of athletes, the Sports Medicine Centre should not be viewed in isolation. Its real usefulness will depend on its connection with the Islands Healthcare Complex, making it possible to link sports medicine, rehabilitation, research, training and public health. Only at that more integrated level will the centre fully justify its value – not merely as a support for local sport, but as an asset of broader utility for the MSAR.

That vision would gain even more weight if it were accompanied by stronger exchanges among the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan in areas such as sports medicine, performance science, technical training, rehabilitation and prevention. The synergy between these spaces could open new possibilities for learning, the exchange of knowledge, and better resource management – giving the centre a broader purpose better suited to the region's future needs.

More importantly still, this direction could have direct effects on residents' lives. An integrated vision linking public health, training, science and sport would help raise service quality, create new opportunities for young people, enhance the value of qualified professionals, improve quality of life and strengthen Macao's integration into networks of knowledge and innovation. The point is not simply to project the image of the MSAR abroad, but to build, on the basis of these sectors, a model of development that is more useful, more modern and more centred on people.

## Youth, talent and regional circulation

### *Opening opportunities and creating more attractive models for health and sport*

This potential becomes even more relevant when another, often underestimated, factor is taken into account. There are already highly qualified professionals from Macao and Portugal working in Taiwan, the Chinese mainland and elsewhere in Asia, particularly in health, science, technology and also sport. Many highly skilled Portuguese professionals currently work in hospitals, universities, training centres and technical structures in the Chinese mainland, showing that this exchange of expertise is not an abstract

possibility, but an existing reality.

Creating mechanisms to attract, reconnect, and engage these professionals – through research projects, cooperation programmes, or flexible mobility models – would allow the MSAR to build a regional knowledge network.

More than simply attracting resources, the aim would be to position Macao as an active node in a network of talent, innovation, and qualified experience.

This effort could also pave the way for a complementary model – one that is more flexible, better suited to current demands, and capable of attracting skilled talent in health and sport.

The aim is not to bypass rules, but to create mechanisms better adapted to regional realities – ones that are more competitive in attracting expertise and more appealing to professionals who might otherwise avoid Macao if faced with rigid or uninviting structures.

This debate also has a generational dimension that cannot be ignored. For too long, the vision for Macao's future has been narrowed to a handful of sectors—primarily business and public administration. Yet Macao's youth are more diverse than that, and so are their aspirations.

For many young people in Macao – particularly those in health, science, sport, and research – the future cannot be reduced to waiting for recruitment notices from the Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre, or being forced to switch professions for lack of opportunity. Building a more ambitious axis of regional and international cooperation would open new paths for that generation, allowing them to remain connected to Macao without being constrained by the narrowness of the local market.

To achieve this, what is required is not merely adjustment, but a change of scale. It means moving from a reactive logic to one of anticipation, and from sectoral policy to an integrated strategy.

## External articulation and a future vision

### *Macao as a point of contact, cooperation and ambition*

Seen in this light, health and sport cease to be merely specialised sectors or venues for symbolic representation. They also become instruments of knowledge, qualification, prevention, well-being and external projection. This is particularly relevant at a time when the country is combining strategic stability with concrete instruments of influence. The question, therefore, is no longer only what Beijing is doing, but how places such as Macao interpret that movement and position themselves within it.

For the MSAR, the challenge is no longer one of framework, but of ambition. Situated between integration and functional autonomy, heritage and innovation, and connection and projection, Macao today possesses unique conditions to assert a role of its own. But that role will not emerge by inertia; it depends on vision, coordination, and the capacity to execute.

If the earlier phase was marked by the reading of signals, the phase now opening will be defined by the ability to turn them into strategy. It is at this intersection—where politics, economics, knowledge, and quality of life meet—that Macao's place in the next regional and international cycle will, to a significant extent, be decided.

*\*The author is an independent sports analyst and regional development consultant. A former public official with extensive international experience, they have a long-standing commitment to public policy and sports development.*

# Macau police arrest 25 HK & mainland suspects for money laundering, fraud, document forgery

Armando Neves

The Judiciary Police (PJ) arrested 25 suspects from Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland for money laundering, fraud and document forgery on Thursday, PJ spokesman Leng Kam Lon said during a special press conference on Friday.

Leng said that the gang comprised two Hong Kong suspects and 23 from the Chinese mainland, aged between 22 and 62.

He added that the mainland's Public Security Bureau (PSB) also arrested 40 suspected members of the gang across multiple provinces and cities.

According to Chan Cho Man, head of the PJ's Criminal Investigation Department, the investigation revealed that since January last year, the gang had been approaching gamblers near hotels in Zape and Cotai, offering "legal" and "favourable" currency exchange services.

The gang gained the victims' trust by forging screenshots of mainland IDs to create the illusion that transfers were being made directly from legitimate accounts, Chan said.

He added that some gamblers subsequently had their bank accounts frozen within days

because the funds were linked to proceeds of fraud. Upon returning to the mainland, these victims were then listed as criminal suspects themselves.

According to Chan, a total of 12 victims lost 3.59 million yuan (4.24 million patacas), with the funds connected to telecom and investment fraud cases across eight mainland Chinese provinces and cities.

Chan noted that the gang used virtual currencies to transfer the illicit proceeds, involving at least HK\$45.6 million (47.0 million patacas) in money laundering and generating illegal profits of approximately HK\$2.5 million.

The Judiciary Police conducted targeted investigations into these cases and collaborated with the Public Security Bureau, leading to the identification of a cross-border gang operating in Macau and the Chinese mainland.

On Thursday, PJ officers arrested the 25 suspects in the peninsula, in three hotel guestrooms in Cotai and at various border checkpoints. They also seized HK\$5.7 million in cash and a batch of equipment



Judiciary Police (PJ) officers escort the 25 hooded fraud, money-laundering and document-forgery suspects to PJ vehicles outside the PJ headquarters in Zape on Friday.  
— Photo: Maria Cheang Ut Meng

used to forge documents, including printers, anti-counterfeit labels and a card shredder.

Chan said that PSB officers arrested a further nine suspects across several provinces and cities in the Chinese mainland, including three alleged kingpins. In addition, the PSB dismantled 11 underground

banks in Zhuhai linked to the money laundering network, resulting in the arrest of another 31 suspects.

The 25 suspects arrested by the PJ were transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) on Friday, each facing charges of money laundering, fraud, and document forgery. ■

## UM hosts biomedical symposium for ECRs



This undated handout photo provided by the University of Macau (UM) on Friday shows Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) Dean Deng Chuxia addressing the "10th Symposium on Biomedical Sciences for Students, Postdoctoral Fellows and Research Assistants" on the public university's campus in Hengqin.

Khalel Vallo

The public University of Macau's (UM) Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) announced in a statement on Friday that it recently held a biomedical sciences symposium for students and early career researchers (ECRs)\* as part of celebrations marking the university's 45th anniversary.

According to the statement, the 10th Symposium on Biomedical Sciences for Students, Postdoctoral Fellows and Research Assistants, organised by the faculty, brought together members of the three groups to exchange ideas and present research findings.

Addressing the event, FHS Dean Deng Chuxia (aka Chuxia Deng) highlighted the faculty's development over the past 13 years, noting its growth from a small academic team to a community of more than 50 faculty members and over 1,200 graduates, adding that the faculty has undertaken 370 research projects and published more than 2,800 academic papers, contributing to the university's placement in the 151-175 band for life sciences and medical and health in global subject rankings, the statement noted.

Deng also revealed that preparations are underway to upgrade

the faculty into a medical school, the statement said. He noted that the plan will focus on integrating basic and clinical medicine, optimising academic structures and strengthening the overall medical education and research ecosystem, the statement added.

The symposium featured eight oral presentations, with participants speaking about their latest research findings across a range of fields. Around 50 research posters were also presented, covering topics such as cancer and stem cells, genomics, bioinformatics, neuroscience, drug discovery, immunology and public health, according to the statement.

In his closing remarks, FHS Associate Dean Xu Renhe commended the success of the event and congratulated the eight winners of the oral and 20 recipients of the poster presentation on their awards, adding that the symposium provided a platform for participants to enhance their academic communication skills and broaden their research perspectives, the statement concluded. ■

\* The term early career researcher (ECR) generally refers to academics who are in the opening stages of their research careers, such as doctoral candidates or postdoctoral researchers. — Gemini

## Mental health awareness event promotes inclusion, stress relief

Khalel Vallo

A community event promoting mental well-being and healthy living was held yesterday in Iao Hon Market Garden in Areia Preta, bringing together local organisations and non-resident worker (NRW) communities to raise awareness and reduce the stigma surrounding mental health.

Titled "Healthy Mind, Healthy Life: A day to rest, to relieve your stress!", the event was organised by Be Cool Project, an initiative by the Association of Rehabilitation of Drug Abusers of Macau (ARTM).

The one-day, open-air event featured a series of interactive activities aimed at encouraging healthier lifestyles and open conversations about mental health. The programme included an opening ceremony, booth activities with games and information materials, a session on relaxation and healthy living tips, a Zumba\* session, and cultural performances by NRW communities, including Filipino, Indonesian, Nepalese and Vietnamese groups.

Speaking to the *Post* on the event's sidelines yesterday, Marcus Leong Ka Ho, deputy director of ARTM, said the initiative was designed to address the persistent stigma surrounding mental health issues. He said some individuals were reluctant to seek help due to fear of being judged or labelled, adding that public pressure can discourage those experiencing difficulties from accessing support services.

"That's why we want to promote awareness in the community and



Guests interact with some of the booths during yesterday's "Healthy Mind, Healthy Life: A day to rest, to relieve your stress!" community event in Iao Hon Market Garden in Areia Preta district.  
— Photo: Khalel Vallo

reduce stigma", he said. "There is nothing to hide. If you ask for help, we will help". Leong added that the event also aimed to strengthen connections between service providers and minority communities, who may face language and cultural barriers when accessing local mental health services.

By inviting migrant groups to participate alongside support organisations, the event sought to expand the desired outreach and improve accessibility. Leong also highlighted the link between substance use and mental health challenges, noting that early prevention efforts can reduce the need for treatment in the long term. "As a frontline NGO [non-

governmental organisation] in addiction services, we believe that if we invest more in prevention, we can have fewer people needing treatment," he said.

The objective of the event was, according to the organisers, to underscore the importance of community engagement, inclusivity and early intervention in promoting mental well-being, while encouraging residents to seek support when needed. ■

\*Zumba is a popular branded dance-fitness programme, often called "exercise in disguise", that combines high-energy Latin and international music with dance movements to create a total-body cardio workout. — DeepSeek



Revellers take part in the festive atmosphere of yesterday's "2026 Macau Myanmar Thingyan Festival" was held at Parque Municipal Dr. Sun Yat Sen (紀念孫中山市政公園) – Photos: Rui Pastorin



# Macau Myanmar Friendship Association hosts Thingyan celebration

Interview by Rui Pastorin

Revellers gathered in Dr. Sun Yat Sen Municipal Park (紀念孫中山市政公園) yesterday for traditional Myanmar food, a lively programme, and the spraying of water for a festive celebration of Thingyan\*, aka traditional Myanmar's New Year festival, also known as the country's "Water Festival".

Organised by the Macau Myanmar Friendship Association and venue-sponsored by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM), yesterday's one-day "2026 Macau Myanmar Thingyan Festival" saw many revellers from the local Myanmar community, alongside locals and members of Macau's other ethnic communities.

While Macau regularly sees celebrations of Thingyan held at Rotunda de Carlos da Maia, colloquially known as "Three Lamps" (三盞燈), yesterday's one-day event

marked the debut celebration held by the Macau Myanmar Friendship Association, which was founded in 2015 and currently has around 3,000 members, Tim Wong (黃德來), vice president and director of the Macau Myanmar Friendship Association told the *Post* during an interview yesterday. Wong also serves as president of the Macau Economic, Technological and Livelihood Promotion Association, one of the event's co-organisers.

"The main target is to promote Macau, Myanmar and the Chinese community, as well as the economy and cultural exchanges between these places", Wong pointed out. He noted his confidence in the event's success, estimating that participants already stood at 600 at the time of the interview. "Maybe the maximum will be a thousand participants today [yesterday]", Wong said, with a statement issued later

that day indicating that the final number was close to the intended goal.

Programme highlights included cultural performances, a fashion show spotlighting participants in traditional Myanmar garb representing eight ethnic groups, stalls providing delicacies from Myanmar, and the continuous spraying of water throughout the afternoon. It also invited performances delivered by a Chinese association, as well as those from the local Filipino and Indonesian communities. Guests who officiated at the ceremony yesterday afternoon comprised association representatives alongside those from the local government, associations and consular officials representing Myanmar, Nepal and the Philippines.

Wong said that the organisers hope to continue the momentum of the event's success, with bigger plans set for next year.

Among them, Wong pointed out that they are hoping for a longer run of three to four days and at a larger scale. They also aim to cooperate with associations representing local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and other communities for next year's edition, with the aim to contribute to the local economy's further development. Moreover, he said his group hopes to extend its guest invitations to other consular-general in Macau, including the Portuguese consular-general.

\* Regarded as Myanmar's most important public holiday, Thingyan, often referred to as the Water Festival, is a time of cleansing, renewal, and celebration. The festival usually takes place in mid-April (traditionally around April 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup>). It lasts for four or five days, culminating on New Year's Day according to the Burmese [Myanmar] lunar calendar. - Gemini

# Macau Customs seizes 307 kg of cigars worth 4.54 million patacas



This undated handout photo provided by the Macau Customs Service on Saturday shows cigars seized by its officers at the Inner Harbour Ferry Terminal.

## Armando Neves

The Macau Customs Service announced in a statement on Saturday that its officers seized 307 kg of cigars worth 4.54 million patacas at the Inner Harbour Ferry Terminal on Tuesday.

According to the statement, on that day, customs officers inspected a batch of imported cigars at the terminal and discovered that the actual quantity of the goods far exceeded the amount declared in the accompanying documents, suggesting an attempt to illegally import the cigars into Macau through underreporting.

The statement said that a total of 307 kg of cigars were seized at the scene, with an estimated market value of around 4.54 million patacas, adding that the tax payable on the goods amounts to 1.33 million patacas.

According to the statement, the customs officers identified the consignee of the goods as a Macau-based company.

The company's actions violated the provisions of the External Trade Law, the statement said, adding that the authorities have initiated legal proceedings against the person responsible for the company.

If the violations are confirmed, the individual faces a fine of 100,000 patacas.

## Zhuhai Gongbei Customs seizes cigars, silver granules

Meanwhile, Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs announced in two statements yesterday that its officers seized 7.62 kg of silver granules and 611 cigars at Hengqin border checkpoint on April 10 and 14, respectively.



This undated handout photo provided by Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs yesterday shows six packs of silver granules strapped to the smuggler's calves.

On April 10, customs officers at the checkpoint noticed a male traveller entering the "green channel" with an unusual gait and immediately intercepted him. Upon inspection, the officers discovered six packets of silver granules wrapped in plastic bags strapped to his calves, weighing a total of 7.62 kg.

According to chatbot Gemini, based on the current market spot price for fine silver, 7.62 kg of silver was valued at around 160,119 patacas.

Last Tuesday, customs officers at the checkpoint noticed an anomaly in the X-ray image of a cross-border vehicle. Upon inspection, they discovered 611 cigars worth 150,000 yuan (177,360 patacas) concealed inside a hidden compartment beneath the vehicle's centre console.

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

# Sam 'fully understands' Tai's decision to resign

## Tony Wong

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai says that he "fully understands" Anton Tai Kin Ip's decision to resign from the position of secretary for economy and finance for personal reasons.

Sam made the remarks while addressing a press briefing on Friday about his working visit to Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, and Belgium.

The press briefing was held at a pressroom in the Macau checkpoint of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) on Friday night upon Sam's departure for his working visit.

Upon Sam's proposal, the State Council decided on Thursday last week to remove Tai from the position of the MSAR's policy secretary for economy and finance after he had submitted his resignation to Sam "for personal reasons".

Tai confirmed in a statement on Thursday that he formally requested to resign from the position of secretary for economy and finance from Sam "some time ago" for personal reasons.

Tai's resignation took effect on Thursday, i.e., on the eve of Sam's four-nation trip to Europe. Tai's resignation took effect less than 16 months since he took office as the MSAR's secretary for economy and finance on December 20, 2024.

During Friday's press briefing, Sam said that before Tai formally tendered his resignation to him, they had engaged in "in-depth exchanges and discussions", enabling him to "fully understand" Tai's situation. Sam said that he "understands and supports" Tai's decision to resign from the position of secretary for economy and finance for personal reasons.

Sam underlined the need to "respect" Tai's personal wish not to disclose further information



Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai addresses Friday's press briefing at a pressroom in the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge's (HZMB) Macau checkpoint. - Photo: GCS

concerning his reasons for resigning, while also urging everybody to respect Tai's right to privacy.

Moreover, Sam also reaffirmed that Tai, during his tenure as the MSAR's secretary for economy and finance over the past 16 months, "diligently and conscientiously fulfilled his duties together with his colleagues" in advancing the local government's work in the economic and financial policy portfolio. Sam said that he fully recognised Tai's work and contributions during his tenure.

Sam also underlined that once he has found a suitable candidate for the post of the MSAR's secretary for economy and finance, he will submit the nomination to the Central People's Government for appointment, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the MSAR Basic Law.

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

## Govt postpones 3rd Five-Year Plan consultation to next month

Meanwhile, Sam also confirmed during Friday's press

briefing that the local government has decided to postpone its public consultation on its drafting of Macau's 3rd Five-Year Plan, which was initially slated for this month, to next month.

Sam underlined that it is the top priority of the MSAR government this year to ensure the effective drawing-up and implementation of Macau's 3rd Five-Year Plan in close alignment with the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan and in line with Macau's own situation.

The nation's 15th Five-Year Plan was passed by the National People's Congress (NPC) in Beijing last month.

Sam said that his government had "basically" completed the drafting of the public consultation document, and was now making further improvements to it.

Sam underlined that the MSAR government has been thoroughly studying the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan, with the aim of ensuring that its public consultation document on the drafting of Macau's 3rd Five-Year Plan will closely align with the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan.

The public consultation would last 40 days, Sam said. ■

# Fire possibly caused by 'feline suspect': Fire Services Bureau

## Armando Neves

The Fire Services Bureau (CB) announced in a statement on Saturday that a cat is suspected of having started a fire in a flat of a

residential building on Avenida do Conselheiro Ferreira de Almeida (荷蘭園大馬路).

The bureau said in the statement that it received an emergency call

on Saturday at 10:46 a.m. about a fire in a flat in the Hoi Tou Garden Building (海濤花園) near Lou Lim Ioc Garden.

After arriving at the building, firefighters extinguished the blaze in the kitchen of the 20th-floor flat.

The firefighters noted that the area affected by the fire measured approximately one metre by two metres and was blackened by thick smoke. The statement added that the blaze was suspected to have been caused by a cat accidentally switching on a ceramic hob, also known as cooktop.

According to the statement, 30 people were evacuated. Three people felt unwell during the incident but left of their own accord after being assessed by paramedics.

Speaking via phone yesterday, a CB spokesperson confirmed that the cat survived the incident. ■



A woman carries a cat in front of a residential building on Avenida do Conselheiro Ferreira de Almeida after a fire probably caused by the "feline suspect" in the kitchen of a flat on the 20th floor on Saturday morning.

- Photo courtesy of Macao Daily News

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## Macau Weather

MAINLY CLOUDY.  
MIST AT FIRST.  
A FEW SHOWERS.  
POSSIBLE THUNDERSTORMS  
LATER.  
FORCE 2 TO 4 SOUTH TO  
SOUTHEASTERLY WINDS.  
RELATIVE HUMIDITY  
WILL RANGE  
BETWEEN 75%  
AND 95%.



23°C~28°C

Source: SMG

## Sam meets Ambassador Yang in Lisbon

*Continued from p.1*

During the meeting, which was held in a hotel, Sam said that he shared much common ground with the students as he had previously travelled from Macau to Portugal to pursue further studies there. Macau and Portugal share profound historical ties, with marks of mutual integration in areas such as language, culture, law, and architecture, which have become Macau's signature characteristics and unique advantages, Sam said.

For the students, Sam said, studying in Portugal is not merely a personal educational choice, but also a continuation of the deep ties and friendship between Macau and Portugal. Such ties create a responsibility: the inheritance of the past and the forging of the future, Sam said.

According to the statement, Sam noted that "people" are the key pillar of the Macau government's ongoing campaign to strengthen Macau's role as a commercial and trade cooperation service platform between China and Portuguese-speaking countries, more specifically, he said, versatile, talented people who are proficient in both languages, familiar with both cultures, and equipped with professional skills and a global perspective.

### Sam's 3 expectations

During the meeting, the statement said, Sam raised three expectations for the students.

Sam said that the first is to focus on their studies, lay a solid



**A student takes a selfie with Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai, other Macau officials, and other Macau students studying in Portugal on the sidelines of the meeting at a hotel in Lisbon on Saturday night (local time).**  
— Photo: GCS

foundation, and make good use of their advantages of being in Portugal to enhance their cross-cultural communication skills.

Sam said that the second is to broaden their horizons, play the role of a bridge, and tell China's story and Macau's story well to students from all over the world.

The third, Sam said, is to maintain deep affection for their nation and Macau, returning to Macau to fully apply their talents upon completion of their studies.

According to the statement, Sam said that studying abroad is an incredibly precious life experience, adding that while bringing the joy of achievement, it inevitably comes with difficulties and loneliness, reminding them that the motherland and Macau are their strongest backing. Sam underlined that the Macau government will continue

strengthening communication with Macau students studying in Portugal in order to pay close attention to their studies and development.

Meanwhile, on Saturday afternoon (local time) in Lisbon, Sam attended the opening ceremony of an arts and cultural exhibition "Reflections of a Sea of Mirrors: 500 Years of Exchange between Chinese and Western Civilisations in Macau".

The exhibition is jointly organised by the MSAR's Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) and the Macau Scientific and Cultural Centre in Portugal.

According to an IC statement released yesterday morning (Macau time), the exhibition, which is being held at the Macau Scientific and Cultural Centre in Portugal in Lisbon, opens between 10 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. daily except Mondays. ■

## Macao Int'l Audio-Visual Festival slated for June

*Rui Pastorin*

The inaugural Macao International Audio-Visual Festival (MIAVF) is slated to be held at Wynn Macau from June 1-3, according to a Friday statement by the integrated resort operator.

"The festival aims to present an industry exchange event that is both professional and international, fostering deep synergy between China's Internet audio-visual industry and its global counterparts", the statement noted.

Among the activities set for the three-day event are an internet audio-visual works showcase, internet influencers award ceremony, international microdrama gala, short video creation activities, professional industry forums, and business matching and promotion sessions.

The statement said that the Macao Internet Audiovisual Association held a launch ceremony during 13<sup>th</sup> China Internet Audio & Video Convention's main forum in Chengdu last Wednesday, adding that Wynn is a "strategic partner" of the upcoming event.

The statement said that the event will be organised by the China Netcasting Services Association (CNSA), the Macao Internet Audiovisual Association, the Federation of Associations of Cultural Sectors of Macau, Macao Cultural Promotion Association, and Nam Kwong Culture and Creativity Industry Co., Ltd.

According to the statement, the unveiling was witnessed by Nie Chenxi, a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), deputy director of its Committee on Culture, Historical Data and Studies, and CNSA president; and He Biao, deputy director and NRTA Communist Party of China (CPC) Leadership Group member.

Cultural Affairs Bureau President Deland Leong Wai Man, who is accompanying Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai on his current official visit to Europe, urged potential participants in a message by video link to join the upcoming event in Macau. ■



**This handout photo provided by integrated resort operator Wynn Macau Limited on Friday shows officiating guests and representatives at a launch ceremony on Wednesday at the main forum of the 13<sup>th</sup> China Internet Audio & Video Convention.**

## Marathon of innovation has no finish line

*China Daily Editorial*

The half-marathon in Beijing's E-Town economic and technological development zone yesterday showcased a leap in the capabilities of Chinese-made humanoid robots.

The winner of the race, autonomous-navigation robot "Lightning", developed by Honor, completed the race in an impressive 50 minutes and 26 seconds, despite a minor mishap near the finish line, surpassing the human world record.

"Lightning" incorporates Honor's proprietary integrated joint modules, delivering a peak torque of 400 Nm. Its liquid-cooling system features cooling channels that penetrate deep into the motor's interior like capillaries to dissipate heat, while a high-power liquid pump generates a heat-exchange flow exceeding 4 liters per minute. This design effectively resolves the thermal management challenges associated with high-load operation.

The event's evolution from its inaugural edition, which focused on technical feasibility, to this year's emphasis on capabilities, is a testament to China's rapid technological development.

In contrast to last year's race, when navigation required remote control, many humanoid robot competitors this year are competing with fully autonomous navigation. Teams that have "discarded the remote control"

now make up 40 percent of the field – demonstrating their ability to perform localization, obstacle avoidance and path planning. This marks a big improvement in their autonomous operation capabilities.

Beyond the track, there is a layer of invisible infrastructure that allowed the competing robots to run with greater ease and precision. Qianxun SI, leveraging the BeiDou Navigation Satellite System, provided centimeter-level high-precision positioning for over two-thirds of the autonomous navigation teams. Meanwhile, the telecommunication service providers deployed a three-dimensional event network based on 5G-Advanced infrastructure and 5G "smart slicing" technology, delivering millisecond-level response times and a communication environment with near-zero lag. This forward-looking new infrastructure is precisely what made the humanoid robot half-marathon a reality.

These improvements are a reflection of the broader progress in China's robotics industry. The shift from isolated breakthroughs to testing comprehensive capabilities underscores the sector's transition from theoretical possibility to practical application.

In terms of industry scale, data released by the international research firm Omdia show that global shipments of humanoid



**Humanoid robot "Flash" of Jueyingchitu Team in the remote-controlled category crosses the finish line during the Beijing E-Town half-marathon and humanoid robots half-marathon in the Beijing Economic-Technological Development Area in southeast Beijing, yesterday.**  
— Xinhua

robots reached 13,000 units in 2025, with China accounting for 90 percent of the total. Chinese companies swept the top six spots on the shipment rankings.

This rapid scaling has been driven not only by cost and pricing advantages but also by the comprehensive strengths forged through a robust supply chain and supporting capabilities. Not long ago, industry insiders estimated that the cost of custom-developing a humanoid robot in Shenzhen could be as low as 2 million yuan. Supported by the availability of core components and comprehensive engineering capabilities, the barriers

to innovation in humanoid robotics continue to fall.

Over the past two years, domestic humanoid robots in China have achieved substantial progress in both foundational software – such as vision-language-action models and embodied world models – and core hardware, including frameless torque motors and harmonic reducers. Through continual innovation, many teams have developed unique strengths and carved out their own positions in the competitive market.

That said, the remarkable performance of humanoid robots is inseparable from China's vast

"innovation laboratory". And in an increasing number of factories, humanoid robots are tightening screws and moving materials, becoming an indispensable part of a new human-robot collaborative manufacturing model.

On a broader scale, government departments at various levels have introduced strong policy support and well-crafted initiatives – such as building open-source communities for humanoid robots, releasing dataset standards, establishing government investment funds, and publishing application scenario catalogs. These measures have enabled China's humanoid robotics industry to rapidly transition from technical validation to real-world deployment.

The marathon of innovation has no finish line. The defining feature of the humanoid robot half-marathon is the principle of promoting research, industry, and application through competition. The focus has shifted from "whether they can finish the race" to "how fast they can run" – and the pace of technological progress is even more thrilling than the race itself. By staying committed to independent innovation, strengthening self-reliance, and leveraging the advantages of a vast market and diverse application scenarios, China is poised to achieve even better results in this innovation marathon. — AFP

# China's consumer shift: not just importing, but integrating global supply chains

## Analysis

HAIKOU – The sixth China International Consumer Products Expo (CICPE) concluded on Saturday in Haikou, capital of Hainan Province.

It drew 3,413 premium consumer brands from 67 countries and regions, with international exhibits making up 65 percent of the total, a sharp increase of 20 percentage points from the previous edition.

The strong turnout reflects the growing demand among Chinese consumers for high-quality and diverse products, as the country keeps opening its market wider.

According to the organizer, the total exhibition area reached 143,000 square meters, up 13,000 square meters from the previous edition. The cumulative number of visitors exceeded 340,000, with single-day attendance surpassing 60,000, both setting new records. Meanwhile, over 200 new products made their debut, double last year's number, covering fields like healthcare, jewelry and digital technology.

To boost supply-procurement efficiency and better serve global supply chains, this year's CICPE upgraded its online supply-demand matching platform and launched a 1,000-square-meter buyer service center for the first time, offering full-process matchmaking services to exhibitors and buyers. The expo also hosted over 10 dedicated matchmaking events, attracting some 65,000 professional buyers, among whom 3,000 were from overseas, triple the number of last year.

At a more profound level, this consumption upgrade is reshaping the global supply chain landscape – driving international brands to pivot

from “entering China” to “adapting to China,” allowing them to respond more quickly to consumer preferences while maintaining proximity to the local market.

“Despite rising global uncertainties, the CICPE has grown in scale year by year, consistently attracting international brands for debuts. The concentration of new product launches at this year's expo, in particular, shows how much international brands value China's consumer market,” said Andrew Wu, president of Dun & Bradstreet China.

Moreover, bolstered by the latest five-year plan's (2026-2030) clear mandate to boost consumption, China's stable consumer demand will undoubtedly encourage more international companies to invest more and expand their presence in the market.

“China is not just a growing market. It is a platform for innovation, competition, research and development, partnership, and learning,” Sean Stein, president of the US-China Business Council, said at the launch event of the sixth CICPE on Monday. “So American companies are not only selling in China, they're investing in China, they're building in China. And most importantly, they are partnering with Chinese companies, both in China and around the world.”

At this year's expo, the Volkswagen Group made a prominent appearance with its brand portfolio, including Bentley, Lamborghini and Audi, focusing on new energy and intelligent mobility to further deepen its presence in China and align with Chinese consumer demand.

“The product portfolio not only shows the group's continuously



Unitree Robotics' humanoid robots perform during the sixth China International Consumer Products Expo (CICPE) in Haikou, Hainan Province, on Saturday. The sixth China International Consumer Products Expo (CICPE), a key gateway into China's vast consumer market and a platform for China to offer more quality consumer products to the rest of the world, concluded in the tropical island province on Saturday. – Xinhua

updated product lineup and steadily enhanced technological strength, but also underscores our firm commitment to deeply cultivating the Chinese market,” said Su Bahong, vice president of Volkswagen Group China.

With over 70 leading enterprises having set up operations in Hainan thanks to the first five CICPE editions, the expo is emerging as a key link for global companies to tap into China's opportunities, and for Chinese brands looking to expand into international markets.

Meanwhile, this year's CICPE also featured, for the first time, a 360-square-meter Taiwan exhibition area, where about 20 Taiwanese companies presented 24 brands. The initiative is designed to promote Taiwan specialty products globally and help more Taiwan businesses integrate into the dual-circulation

development pattern that connects the domestic and international markets, said Yin Libo, a senior Hainan official.

Many Taiwanese businesspeople expressed their willingness to further cultivate the mainland market, and Yin said Taiwan businesses are welcome to share in the FTP's opportunities.

More than 2,900 Taiwan-invested enterprises had been registered in Hainan by the end of 2025, with actual Taiwan investment totaling about US\$5.9 billion, according to the provincial authority.

Chinese trendy e-commerce platform Poizon, an exhibitor for six consecutive years, saw its AI authentication zone become a major attraction this year, allowing visitors to upload product photos and receive instant professional

authentication reports. According to Chen Yuyao, a booth staff member, the platform has provided over 1.37 billion authentication services, covering nearly 3,000 brands across 26 major categories. Its “authenticate-before-ship” model has created a strong guarantee for quality consumption.

“China's tech innovation is integrating into all consumption scenarios, including retail, mobility and healthcare, enhancing consumer experiences while pushing global supply chains to become more digital, intelligent and efficient,” Wu said.

The policy dividends of the Hainan Free Trade Port's (FTP) are providing institutional support for linking global supply chains. Meiyu Pearl, a CICPE exhibitor at this year's expo, has directly benefited from the “tariff exemption for value-added processing” policy under the Hainan FTP's island-wide special customs operations. By integrating global sourcing, local processing and global sales into a single chain, the company has cut costs, boosted competitiveness and is now leveraging the expo to accelerate its entry into the global jewelry trade cycle.

Kuang Xianming, deputy head of the China Institute for Reform and Development, said the shift from “buying global” to “linking global” demonstrates the strengths of China's super-sized market and its high-level opening-up. The CICPE will continue to amplify its platform effect, using consumption upgrades to optimize supply chains and promote efficient allocation of global resources and market integration, thereby contributing to world economic prosperity.

– Xinhua

## NDRC allocates 2<sup>nd</sup> batch of ultra-long special treasury bonds for key projects

BEIJING – The National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) has released the second batch of major project lists for 2026 under the central authorities' initiative for implementing major national strategies and building security capacity in key areas.

It also allocated 216.8 billion yuan of ultra-long special treasury bonds to support 336 key projects, according to the commission's announcement yesterday.

The projects span key areas including artificial intelligence, urban underground pipeline renovation, transport infrastructure along the Yangtze River Economic Belt, high-standard farmland, and higher education upgrading, the

commission said.

Combined with the first batch of 389.7 billion yuan previously allocated, the total funding for supporting projects for implementing major national strategies and building security capacity in key areas has reached 606.5 billion yuan, accounting for 76 percent of the full-year earmarked amount of 800 billion yuan.

An official from the commission said that further efforts will be made to improve investment and financing mechanisms, accelerate the implementation of “soft infrastructure” measures, and strengthen supervision of central investment funds.

– Xinhua, MPD

## Foreign buyers hit record for first phase of Canton Fair

GUANGZHOU – The first phase of the 139<sup>th</sup> China Import and Export Fair, also known as the Canton Fair, closed yesterday with a record number of overseas buyers, the organizer said.

As of 5 p.m. yesterday, about 167,000 overseas buyers from 216 countries and regions had attended the offline exhibition, up 5.9 percent from the same period of the previous edition, according to the China Foreign Trade Center.

The turnout, the highest for any first phase of the fair, underscored the resilience and vitality of China's foreign trade, it said. The first phase of the fair, themed “advancing manufacturing,” featured more than 25,000 booths and over 12,000 exhibitors.

This year's fair is being held in three offline phases in Guangzhou and will run through May 5. The second phase, scheduled from April 23 to 27, will focus on “quality home



Buyers look at grinding wheels at the 139<sup>th</sup> edition of the China Import and Export Fair in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province yesterday. – Xinhua

life,” including building materials, furniture, household products, gifts and decorations.

Established in 1957, the Canton Fair takes place twice a year in Guangzhou. It is the

longest-running of several comprehensive international trade events in China, and it has been hailed as the barometer of China's foreign trade.

– Xinhua

# Fire razes 1,000 'stilt' homes in Malaysia's Sabah, thousands displaced



This handout photo taken and released by Malaysia's Sandakan Fire and Rescue Department yesterday, shows a general view of the Kampung Bahagia water village after a fire, in Sandakan, on Malaysia's Borneo island. — AFP

KUALA LUMPUR — A huge fire destroyed about 1,000 makeshift homes, many of them built on stilts over water, and displaced thousands of people in a coastal village in Malaysia's Sabah state yesterday, authorities said.

The blaze broke out early yesterday morning in a "water village" in Sandakan district in Sabah's northeast, where some of Malaysia's poorest residents, including indigenous and stateless communities, live in closely packed, wooden stilt houses.

Sandakan police chief George Abd Rakman was quoted by local English daily *The Star* as saying

that the "very large-scale and heartbreaking incident" affected 9,007 residents.

The Sabah Fire and Rescue Department said it was notified of the incident at around 1:32 a.m. [local time] and deployed 37 personnel from two stations to battle the fire.

"... the fire involved an estimated 1,000 temporary floating homes with a total area of 10 acres and 100 percent burnt," the department said in a statement.

Narrow access routes prevented fire engines from reaching the site, it said.

"Low sea tide also made it

difficult for firefighters to get access to an open water source," the department's statement said, while strong wind also fuelled the flames.

No injuries or fatalities were reported, it said, adding that "there is no more danger".

Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said the federal government was coordinating with Sabah authorities to provide assistance and temporary accommodation for those affected as soon as possible.

"The priority now is the safety of victims and immediate assistance on the ground," Anwar said in a Facebook post. — AFP

## Philippines forces kill 10 Islamist militants in arrest gunfight

MANILA — Philippine security forces killed 10 alleged armed Islamist militants Friday who resisted an attempt to arrest them, police said.

The firefight with police and soldiers happened in the Muslim-populated south of the mainly Catholic Asian nation, where remnants of Islamic State-inspired groups operate.

Among the dead was Amerol Mangoranca, leader of an armed group called the Maute-Dawlah Islamiya, a regional police report said.

The government force arrived near the town of Marantao before dawn to serve arrest warrants for murder, homicide, and kidnapping

against Mangoranca and his group, it said.

This triggered an hour-long firefight with the group, who included the rebel leader's wife and three other women.

A separate military report said an unharmed infant was recovered after the gunfight.

Government forces sustained no casualties and recovered guns and explosives, the military added.

The group is suspected of being behind a January ambush that killed four soldiers and wounded another, said the Philippine Army's First Infantry Division report.

The slain gunmen were from

the "same network responsible for the Marawi siege and years of violence", the military unit's commander Major-General Yegor Barroquillo said in the statement.

In May 2017, hundreds of Filipino Muslim fighters as well as foreign militants joined forces to take over the Mindanao city of Marawi, intending to make it the capital of a Southeast Asian caliphate to be ruled by their radical interpretation of Islam.

A bloody siege by government forces ended five months later with the loss of more than a thousand lives and with many of the militant groups' most senior leaders being killed. — AFP

## Marcos says ex-MP being held in Czech Republic

MANILA — A former Philippine congressman who fled the country and had his passport cancelled after being charged in a corruption scandal over flood control projects has been detained in the Czech Republic, President Ferdinand Marcos said Friday.

The alleged crime, believed to have cost taxpayers billions of dollars, sparked protests and arrests across the storm-battered archipelago, which was hit by hundreds of floods last year alone according to United Nations data.

Elizaldy Co was charged alongside a number of public works officials and construction firm owners in November, accused of violating the country's anti-graft law over a flood control project in the central Philippines.

"Co was stopped at the German border after entering from the Czech Republic," Marcos said in an update posted on X on Friday.

"He was denied entry and returned to Czech authorities, where he remains in custody."

In an earlier post on Facebook, Marcos said Co was detained in Prague "after crossing into the Czech Republic without proper documentation".

Manila was "in close coordination with the Czech government to ensure that all legal processes are followed and to arrange for his return to the

Philippines at the soonest possible time."

Co, who quit the House of Representatives in September amid the scandal, later went into hiding and began releasing videos he said proved Marcos himself was the mastermind behind the corruption.

The government cancelled Co's passport in December.

Officials pledged the charges against Co would be the "first of many cases brought", as state prosecutors have yet to bring charges against other senators and congressmen implicated in the scam.

A special commission formed by Marcos in September has since been disbanded, with the president saying that "much of their work has already been done".

Marcos has consistently denied any connection to the scandal, noting it was he who brought the issue centre stage in a national address.

The furore surrounding the fraud soon swept up friend and foe alike, including a congressman cousin of Marcos who stepped down as speaker of the House of Representatives in the face of the allegations against him.

The Philippines has a long history of scandals involving public funds, in which high-ranking politicians found guilty of corruption have typically escaped serious jail time. — AFP

## N Korea fires multiple ballistic missiles into sea: Seoul

**Kang Jin-kyu**

SEOUL — North Korea test-fired multiple short-range ballistic missiles yesterday, South Korea's military said, the latest in a recent flurry of launches by the nuclear-armed state.

The launches yesterday add to a series of weapons tests Pyongyang has carried out in recent weeks, including ballistic missiles, anti-warship cruise missiles and cluster munitions.

"Our military detected several short-range ballistic missiles fired into the East Sea from the Sinpo area of North Korea at around 6:10 a.m. [local time]," South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said, referring to a body of water also known as the Sea of Japan.

"The missiles flew approximately 140 kilometres, and South Korean and US intelligence authorities are conducting a detailed analysis of their exact specifications," it added.

Seoul was maintaining a "firm combined defence posture" with its security ally the United States, which stations about 28,000 troops in the South to help it defend against military threats from the North, and will "respond overwhelmingly to any provocation", it said.

South Korea's presidential office said it held an emergency security meeting over the launches.

Analysts said the tests signalled Pyongyang's latest rejection of attempts by Seoul to repair strained ties.

Among them was an expression of regret from Seoul over civilian drone incursions into the North in January, a gesture initially described as "very fortunate and wise behaviour" by Kim Yo Jong, the powerful sister of the North Korean leader.

But this month, a senior North Korean official described the South as "the enemy state most hostile" to Pyongyang, reviving a label previously used by leader Kim Jong Un.

North Korea is subject to multiple United Nations sanctions banning its nuclear weapons development and use of ballistic missile technology, restrictions it has repeatedly flouted.

"Pyongyang must immediately halt its successive missile provocations that are heightening tensions," Seoul's defence ministry said in a statement.

The North should "actively engage in the South Korean government's efforts to establish peace", it added.

### 2 more destroyers

Earlier in April, Kim Jong Un oversaw tests of strategic cruise missiles launched from a naval warship, with official photos showing him watching the firings flanked by military officials.

Those tests were carried out from the Choe Hyon, one of two 5,000-tonne destroyers in the North's arsenal, both launched last year as Kim Jong Un seeks to ramp up the country's naval capabilities.

The North is also building two more 5,000-tonne class destroyers to add to its fleet.

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

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

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



An aerial view shows houses partially submerged in seawater due to tidal flooding along the southern coast of the Java Sea at the Timbulloko village in Demak, Central Java, Indonesia on April Saturday. — AFP

## Nearly 900 Rohingya refugees dead, missing in shipwrecks in 2025: UN

GENEVA – Last year was the deadliest on record for Rohingya refugees fleeing by sea, with deaths continuing to soar in 2026, the UN said Friday, after hundreds were lost in a shipwreck earlier this month.

“In 2025, nearly 900 Rohingya refugees were reported missing or dead in the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal,” the United Nations refugee agency’s spokesman Babar Baloch told a press briefing in Geneva.

That marks “the deadliest year on record” for the region, according to data from UNHCR, he said.

Baloch highlighted that out of the more than 6,500 Rohingya who had attempted perilous sea crossings last year, “one in seven [were] reported missing or dead”.

That, he said, was “the highest mortality rate worldwide of any major route for refugee and migrant sea journeys”.

The Rohingya mainly leave from huge camps in Bangladesh’s Cox’s Bazar, where more than a million refugees forced to flee across the border from war-torn Myanmar’s Rakhine state live in squalid conditions.

Rakhine state has been the scene of fierce fighting between the military and the Arakan Army, an ethnic minority rebel group.

The Rohingya undertake perilous sea journeys every year in search of better living conditions, travelling aboard rickety boats often operated by trafficking networks.

### ‘Unmarked graveyard for thousands’

Baloch roughly estimated that “nearly 200,000 Rohingya refugees ... have taken these dangerous sea journeys since 2012”.

And, he estimated, “more than 5,000 Rohingya refugees have lost their lives during these dangerous sea journeys over a decade”.

“This makes, sadly, the Andaman Sea and the Bay of

Bengal an unmarked graveyard for thousands of desperate Rohingya refugees in recent years.”

Baloch pointed out that most Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh wanted to return to Myanmar “once conditions allow for a voluntary, dignified and safe return”.

But he stressed that “ongoing conflict, persecution and the absence of citizenship prospects leave them with little hope”.

Limited humanitarian aid in Bangladesh, “compounded by insecurity in the camps and limited access to education and livelihoods”, pushes refugees towards dangerous journeys, he explained.

In recent years, more than half of those attempting such crossings have been women and children, according to UNHCR data.

This year, Baloch said, “with more than 2,800 Rohingya undertaking dangerous sea journeys between January and April 13”.

His comments came days after news emerged that a boat carrying about 280 Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi migrants had capsized in the Andaman Sea.

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

Bangladeshi authorities said nine people had been rescued, while Baloch said an estimated 250 people are missing.

“UNHCR is providing counselling and referrals for medical and psychosocial support to Rohingya survivors,” he said.

The UN refugee agency said it was calling on states to “address the root causes of displacement, expand safe and legal pathways, and strengthen regional cooperation to save lives and combat smuggling and trafficking”.

– AFP

## UN rights chief urges immediate release of Myanmar’s Suu Kyi

GENEVA – UN rights chief Volker Turk called for the immediate and unconditional release of Aung San Suu Kyi after the jailed Myanmar democracy icon had her sentence reduced on Friday.

The military has ruled Myanmar by force for almost all of its post-independence history, before a decade-long democratic experiment gave civilian politicians tentative control.

The generals took back power in a 2021 coup that deposed the government of Suu Kyi, now 80, detaining the democratic figurehead and plunging the country into civil war.

“All those detained unjustly since the coup – including state counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi – need to be released immediately and unconditionally,” he said on X.

“There must be an end to the unrelenting violence against all of Myanmar’s people.”

Suu Kyi had her sentence reduced on Friday as part of a mass amnesty, a source close to her legal case told AFP.

Myanmar’s former president Win Myint, also detained since the coup, was also pardoned of his convictions during the post-coup period of military rule, a statement said.

Turk said he was relieved by the “long overdue release” of Win Myint and other prisoners from



A protester holds a poster with an image of detained civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi during a candlelight vigil to honour those who have died during demonstrations against the military coup in Yangon on March 13, 2021. – AFP

arbitrary detention, as well as the commutation of death sentences.

UN chief Antonio Guterres stressed the need for “meaningful efforts” to ensure the swift release of all those arbitrarily detained, his spokesman said in New York.

“A viable political solution must be founded on an immediate cessation of violence and a genuine commitment to inclusive dialogue,” the spokesman said.

“This requires an environment that allows the people of Myanmar to freely and peacefully exercise their political rights.”

Win Myint served as president

starting in 2018, with Myanmar in the midst of its experiment with civilian government that was abruptly halted by the coup.

While he occupied the top spot, it functioned as a ceremonial role following the lead of de facto government head Suu Kyi, who was barred from holding the presidency under a military-drafted constitution.

The Nobel Peace Prize laureate remains detained, serving a 27-year sentence rights groups decry as a politically motivated move to hobble her National League for Democracy party. – AFP

## Fire at Indian firecracker factory kills 20: police

NEW DELHI – A blaze broke out at a firecracker factory in southern India yesterday, killing at least 20 people and injuring six others, police said.

Local police chief N. Shreenatha told AFP that “20 people are confirmed dead” after the incident at a licensed factory in Tamil Nadu state’s Virudhunagar district.

Rescuers were still operating

at the site, he said, adding that the cause of the blaze was unknown.

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

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in a social media post, extended his “condolences to those who have lost their loved ones” in the “deeply distressing” incident.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin said the deaths were “tragic”, expressing his “immense sorrow” in a post on X.

An explosion at a power plant in central India this week killed more than 20 people.

Last month, another fire at a fireworks factory in western India killed 17 people. – AFP

## India gov’t plan for more women in parliament fails vote

NEW DELHI – A proposal to expand India’s parliament to increase the number of women representatives fell through on Friday after the ruling coalition failed to secure enough votes for it in the lower house.

Women currently account for 14 percent of the 543-seat Lok Sabha, the lower house of parliament in the world’s largest democracy of 1.4 billion people.

While boosting the number of women lawmakers has broad support in principle across the political spectrum, critics argue that achieving it by increasing the overall number of seats would primarily benefit Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s party.

Modi’s government convened a special sitting of parliament this week, hoping to pass several landmark bills that could overhaul India’s parliamentary system, including the proposal to fast-track the implementation of a 2023 law reserving 33 percent of Lok Sabha seats for women.

In order to do so, the government said it planned to redraw parliamentary districts based on population, increasing the number of lower house seats to more than 800.

In a Friday vote, the bill failed to get a two-thirds majority and did not pass, parliament speaker Om Birla said. Two other related bills were shelved as a result.

Opposition parties and critics have said that expanding seats in

parliament would benefit states in the densely populated north, where Modi’s Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) enjoys widespread support.

Opposition parties, which control states in southern India where the population is lower, fear they would lose overall power in parliament.

Lawmaker Jairam Ramesh from the opposition Congress Party hailed the defeat of what he called a “nefarious” attempt to link “dangerous delimitation proposals to women’s reservation”.

Instead, Ramesh said in a social media post, the government should implement the 33-percent quota “in the existing set up of the Lok Sabha for the 2029 Elections”. – AFP



Newly arrived Rohingya refugees are stranded on a boat after the nearby community decided not to allow them to land after giving them water and food in Pineung, Aceh province, Indonesia on November 16, 2023. – AFP

## Vance will lead US team to Iran talks in Pakistan: White House

WASHINGTON, DC – US Vice President JD Vance will lead the US delegation for talks with Iran in Pakistan, a White House official said yesterday – shortly after President Donald Trump said he would not make the trip.

Early in the day, Trump announced he was sending negotiators to Islamabad for meetings with Tehran about ending the conflict that has raged in the Middle East, with a ceasefire soon set to expire.

The president however said Vance – who led the last round of talks with Tehran in Islamabad, but came away with no deal – would not make the trip, citing security concerns.

“It’s only because of security,” Trump told ABC News. “JD’s great.”

But the White House quickly flipped the script, when asked about those comments.

Vance, special envoy Steve

Witkoff and Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner will attend the talks, a White House official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The trio were on hand last time around on April 11-12.

Trump earlier accused Iran of a “Total Violation” of the countries’ two-week ceasefire with attacks on Saturday in the Strait of Hormuz – and threatened to destroy its power plants and bridges if no deal is reached.

Trump said on his Truth Social platform that he was offering Iran “a reasonable deal” and if Tehran refuses, “the United States is going to knock out every single Power Plant, and every single Bridge, in Iran. NO MORE MR. NICE GUY!”

“They’ll come down fast, they’ll come down easy and, if they don’t take the DEAL, it will be my Honour to do what has to be done, which should have been done to Iran, by other Presidents, for the last 47 years,” he wrote.

Washington’s envoy to the United Nations, Mike Waltz, told ABC News that he believed the new round of talks would lead to an “incredibly consequential” outcome.

The Strait of Hormuz remained closed yesterday amidst the stand-off. Iran on Saturday declared it shut again to shipping – one day after saying it would reopen the strategic waterway.

A UK maritime security agency said Iran’s Revolutionary Guards had fired at one tanker on Saturday, while security intelligence firm Vanguard Tech reported the force had threatened to “destroy” an empty cruise ship that was fleeing the Gulf.

In the third incident, the UK agency said it received a report of a vessel “being hit by an unknown projectile, which caused damage” to shipping containers but no fire.

The US-Iran ceasefire is scheduled to end on Wednesday.

– AFP

## Israel says to use ‘full force’ in Lebanon despite truce if soldiers face threat

SA NUR – Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said yesterday that the military had been instructed to use “full force” in Lebanon – even during the ongoing ceasefire – should Israeli troops face any threat.

“Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and I have instructed the IDF [Israel Defence Forces] to act with full force, both on the ground and from the air, including during the ceasefire, in order to protect our soldiers in Lebanon from any threat,” Katz said at a function in the occupied West Bank.

He said that the military had also been ordered to demolish any structure or roads that were “booby-trapped” and threatened soldiers.

The aim is “to remove the houses in the villages near the border that served in every respect as Hezbollah terror outposts and threatened Israeli communities,” Katz added.

An Israeli soldier was killed in southern Lebanon on Friday – the day a 10-day ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon came into effect

– when he entered a booby-trapped building, the military reported.

Katz has repeatedly said Israel would demolish houses along the border as part of efforts to establish a security zone in southern Lebanon.

On Saturday, Israeli forces carried out demolitions in the town of Bint Jbeil, the scene of intense fighting with Hezbollah prior to the recently agreed ceasefire.

“The overarching goal of the campaign in Lebanon is the disarmament of Hezbollah and the removal of threat to northern communities, through a combination of military and diplomatic measures,” Katz said.

“If the Lebanese government continues to fail to uphold its obligations – the IDF will do so through continued military action.”

Lebanon was drawn into the Middle East war in early March when the Tehran-backed Hezbollah launched rockets towards Israel in support of Iran.

Israel responded with massive strikes across Lebanon and an invasion of southern Lebanon.

– AFP

## Hezbollah chief says truce can’t be one-sided



Children walk through a damaged store as displaced residents return to the southern Lebanese village of Srifa yesterday. On Friday, a ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon took effect after the first direct talks between the two sides in decades, bringing a pause to weeks of fighting between Israel and Hezbollah that has killed nearly 2,300 people and displaced more than a million. – AFP

BEIRUT – Hezbollah leader Naim Qassem said on Saturday that the ongoing 10-day truce with Israel cannot be one-sided, vowing that his fighters would respond to Israeli attacks on Lebanon.

“A ceasefire means a complete cessation of all hostilities. Because we do not trust this enemy, the resistance fighters will remain in the field with their hands on the trigger, and they will respond to violations accordingly,” Qassem said in a statement read out on TV.

“There is no ceasefire from the side of the resistance only, it must be from both sides.”

He also offered his first reaction since the ceasefire went into force at midnight on Thursday, with the terms shared by the US State Department.

Qassem called it “an insult to

our country and our homeland, Lebanon, that America dictates its text and speaks on behalf of the Lebanese government”.

The truce came days after Lebanon and Israel’s ambassadors to the US met in Washington ahead of planned direct negotiations between the two countries, the first in decades.

“Enough of subjecting Lebanon to these humiliations by negotiating directly with the Israeli enemy and listening to its dictates, and by the shameful spectacle in Washington,” Qassem said.

Tehran-backed Hezbollah drew Lebanon into the Middle East conflict on March 2 by attacking Israel to avenge the killing of Iran’s supreme leader, prompting waves of Israeli airstrikes and a ground invasion in the south.

Qassem expressed “gratitude” to Iran “for their support and assistance”, saying the country kept the Strait of Hormuz closed until a truce was reached in Lebanon.

Iran’s military declared the Strait of Hormuz closed again on Saturday, after a brief reopening, in response to a US blockade of its ports.

The Lebanese government has taken several unprecedented steps against Hezbollah over the past year, including vowing to disarm it and outlawing its military activities.

Hezbollah has rejected these moves, but Qassem maintained his group was “open to the fullest cooperation with the Lebanese authorities, embarking on a new chapter... and utilising our strengths within a national security strategy”.

– AFP

## Syria says foiled cross-border attack by Assad remnants, Hezbollah

DAMASCUS – Syria’s interior ministry said yesterday that security forces thwarted an alleged cross-border attack from the country’s territory planned by remnants of ousted leader Bashar al-Assad and cells linked to Iran-backed Hezbollah.

From March 2 until a 10-day ceasefire went into force on April 17, Hezbollah was battling Israel after drawing Lebanon into the Middle East war with rocket fire aimed at Israel in support of Tehran.

In a statement, the interior ministry said security forces “arrested members of a sabotage cell” linked to Hezbollah and Assad remnants.

The ministry said the cell “was working to carry out an attack from inside Syrian territory on targets outside the borders” from Quneitra province, which borders Israel.

Syria’s official SANA news agency, quoting an interior ministry source, said Hezbollah “intended to launch missiles across the border with the aim of destabilising the country”.

Syrian authorities are hostile to Hezbollah as the group played a key role in Syria’s civil war that ended in 2024, fighting alongside the forces of now ousted leader Bashar al-Assad.

The ministry said the Quneitra incident was the latest among “several attempts to destabilise the country and undermine public

security” involving remnants of the former regime and unscrupulous individuals linked to Hezbollah”.

Last week, Damascus accused Hezbollah of being linked to a cell that attempted to plant an explosive device in front of a house belonging to an unidentified religious figure in the Bab Tuma area of the Syrian capital.

But the group denied the ministry’s claims last week, saying they were “false and fabricated”.

Hezbollah insisted that it has “no activity, no ties and no relationship with any party in Syria, and has no presence on Syrian soil”.

The group called on Syrian authorities “to conduct a thorough investigation before making accusations without evidence”.

It blamed “the presence of intelligence services” on Syrian soil that it said were “seeking to inflame tensions between Lebanon and Syria”.

In February, Syria said it had dismantled a cell responsible for recent attacks targeting Damascus’s Mazzeh district, claiming the weapons came from Hezbollah, which denied any involvement.

Under Assad, Syria was part of Iran’s “axis of resistance” against Israel and enabled the transfer of weapons and money from Iran to Hezbollah.

But since taking over, Syria’s Islamist authorities have rejected Iranian influence.

– AFP

## Leftist leaders gather in Spain to rally against rise of far right



Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum (left) greets Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez at a "Meeting in Defence of Democracy", a gathering of leftist leaders seeking to rally against the perceived threat to democracy from the far right, in Barcelona, Spain on Saturday. – AFP

### Rosa Sulleiro and Alfons Luna

BARCELONA – Leftist leaders from around the globe met in Barcelona on Saturday to show their determination to "protect democracy", as the challenge of far-right politics grows in many countries.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, one of the biggest critics of the United States and Israel's bombing campaigns in the Middle East, told attendees at the opening that "democracy cannot be taken for granted" before ending the day with his slogan "no to war".

He was joined by Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum, who said she put forward a motion against military intervention in Cuba, and Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

Sánchez and Sheinbaum warmly greeted each other on the Mexican leader's first visit to Spain since taking office in October 2024, though she insisted there had never been a "diplomatic crisis" between the two nations.

Ties were strained in 2019 when Mexico insisted Spain apologise for historical abuses during the Spanish conquest and colonisation of the Americas.

Spain's King Felipe VI last month acknowledged "a lot of abuse" had happened in the colonial period in the Americas.

### Call for UN reform

Sánchez called for reform of the United Nations a day after he had urged a reshaped multilateral order to challenge "those who consider it dead or work to undermine its foundations".

Several attendees insisted the meeting, held the same day as a meeting of far-right European leaders in Milan in Italy, was not an anti-Trump jamboree.

It follows the defeat of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in a general election last Sunday, seen as a setback for Europe's far-right parties that had looked to him as a model.

The Barcelona event was launched by Brazil and Spain in 2024 after far-right parties made significant gains in European Parliament elections.

The first two editions of the event were held at the United Nations and the previous one was held in Chile last year.

Sánchez, in power since 2018, has emerged as a prominent figure for Europe's disillusioned progressives, who see him as one of the few remaining openly leftist voices in a continent increasingly dominated by right-wing politics.

– AFP

## 2 officers suspended over claims they fled Kyiv shooting

KYIV – Ukraine's interior minister said yesterday two police officers had been suspended after a video circulated online showed them fleeing the scene of the shooting in Kyiv in which six people were killed.

A gunman opened fire and took hostages at a supermarket in the Ukrainian capital's residential district on Saturday, before being killed during an arrest attempt.

In a video posted by Ukrainian media, two police officers wearing uniforms and yellow vests are seen standing next to a person on the ground before fleeing the scene as gunshots ring out.

"Shameful, unworthy behaviour. This is a disgrace for the entire system. They have been suspended, and an investigation into this is underway," Interior Minister Igor Klymenko said on Telegram.

Klymenko also urged not to "generalise about the entire police force based solely on the actions of two employees".

Police have yet to ascertain the motive behind the shooting – but Klymenko said the attacker's "mental state was clearly unstable".

"How he obtained the necessary medical certificates to extend his gun permit must be examined," Klymenko added.

However, he said that there would be no sweeping checks of gun owners that are legally bound to declare their weapons.

He vowed to hold "expert discussions with the participation of members of parliament, the public, journalists, and the veteran community" on gun control laws.

Ukraine has seen sporadic shooting incidents but has a relatively low violent crime rate.

– AFP, MPD

## Spain urges EU to end association agreement with Israel

MADRID – Spain will ask the European Union to end its association agreement with Israel over alleged violations of international law, Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez said yesterday.

Spain has criticised Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government over the Gaza conflict and Israel's attacks on neighbouring Lebanon. Netanyahu has accused Spain of "hypocrisy and hostility".

"On Tuesday, Spain's government will present a proposal to the EU that the European Union break off its association agreement with Israel", Sánchez told a political rally in Andalusia.

He alleged that Israel "violates international law" and therefore "cannot be a partner of the European Union... it's as simple as that".

Israel's Foreign Minister Gideon Saar responded with a social media post in Spanish saying his country would "not accept hypocritical lectures from someone

who keeps ties with totalitarian regimes", citing Turkey and Venezuela under former leader Nicolás Maduro.

The June 2000 association agreement – a treaty that sets a framework for cooperation – includes a clause requiring respect for human rights.

Spain and Ireland first called for a review in 2024 over Israel's bombardment of Gaza.

Spain's recognition of a Palestinian state the same year infuriated Israel, and Sánchez has stepped up his criticism of Netanyahu's government since.

Spain, Ireland and Slovenia sent a letter to the European Commission on Friday calling for the accord with Israel to be discussed at the next meeting of EU foreign ministers.

Netanyahu this month accused Spain of waging a hostile diplomatic campaign against his country and barred Madrid from taking part in the work of a US-led centre created to help stabilise post-war Gaza.

– AFP

## Rat poison found in baby food jar in Austria as products recalled

VIENNA – Austrian police have found rat poison in a baby food jar in a probe that has seen the company HiPP recall the line over suspected tampering, with the firm stating yesterday its production process was not to blame.

The HiPP brand's German base announced the recall at SPAR supermarkets in Austria on Friday over the possibility that "a hazardous substance" was introduced into its "carrot with potato" puree through tampering.

As part of ongoing investigations in Germany, police have seized jars in Austria, as well as the Czech Republic and Slovakia, police in Austria's eastern Burgenland region said in a statement on Saturday.

"A sample of the seized product was examined on Saturday afternoon and tested positive for rat poison," they said.

HiPP said yesterday that its "production, quality, and control processes are fully intact" and the incident "is in no way related to product quality or production".

"According to the current state of knowledge, as officially confirmed by the authorities, the case concerns only clearly defined sales channels," a HiPP spokesman told AFP.

"Products and distribution channels in Germany or other European countries that

are not part of the investigation are not affected," he added.

### Consumer warning

Austria's agency for food protection said on Saturday that rat poison may have been introduced as part of an extortion scheme.

Customers were asked not to consume the product, which can be identified by a white label with a red circle on the bottom of the jar, and instead return it to the store of purchase.

Czech police yesterday on X also warned consumers.

The scare is the latest to hit the baby food market.

Since December, several manufacturers – including European giants such as Nestlé, Danone and Lactalis – have issued recalls of infant formula in more than 60 countries that could be contaminated with the toxin cereulide.

Several infants who consumed powdered milk containing cereulide – which can cause nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea – have died, according to French authorities.

French prosecutors said in March the death of one baby in January "does not appear to be linked" to the infant's consumption of contaminated formula.

– AFP

## 3 US university students hurt in shooting

WASHINGTON, DC – Three students at the University of Iowa were wounded in a shooting off campus yesterday, the school president said.

The shooting took place in an area of Iowa City not far from campus that is popular for nightlife with numerous bars and restaurants.

Police said officers responded to a report of a "large fight" just before 2 a.m. (local time). The investigation was ongoing. No immediate arrests were reported.

University president Barb Wilson confirmed

that three students were wounded, and urged students to seek counselling if needed.

The United States, where firearms are readily available, has a long history of gun violence that kills thousands of people every year. Shootings on or near college campuses occur frequently.

Two people were killed by gunfire at South Carolina State University in February. And two people were killed and nine others were wounded when a gunman opened fire inside a classroom at Brown University in December.

– AFP

# China-Mozambique cooperation delivers steady gains for development

## Analysis

MAPUTO – Marking the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership in 2026, China and Mozambique are seeing tangible progress in infrastructure, trade, and people-to-people exchanges, delivering momentum to local development and better livelihoods.

## INFRASTRUCTURE UPLIFTS LOCAL LIVES

The Maputo-Katembe Bridge, built by China Road and Bridge Corporation, spans the Maputo Bay and serves as a key transport artery and urban landmark. As Africa's longest suspension bridge by main span, it has reduced the time needed to cross the bay to 5-10 minutes and is regarded by locals as a "bridge of dreams."

In the suburbs of Maputo, a water supply project constructed by China Henan International Cooperation Group benefits nearly 72,000 residents. Fernando Rafael, minister of Public Works, Housing and Water Resources of Mozambique, said that it has added about 30,000 cubic meters of daily water supply capacity, further improving local living conditions.

In Tete city, China Jiangxi International Economic and Technical Cooperation Company has built nearly 3,000 household toilets, helping local families move away from open defecation and live in safer and more hygienic conditions. "Now we have our own toilet, and our children have a more private place to bathe. We feel much more at ease," said Flora Rui, a local resident.

From the bridge spanning the sea to community-level water and sanitation projects, infrastructure initiatives continue to expand, becoming vital support for Mozambicans striving for a better life.

## COOPERATION FUELS TRANSFORMATION

Effective from December 1, 2024, China has granted zero-tariff treatment on 100 percent of products to all least-developed countries with which it has diplomatic relations, including Mozambique, making Mozambican products more competitive in the Chinese market. According to Chinese customs statistics, two-way trade reached US\$5.4 billion in 2025.

In Niassa Province in northern Mozambique, a graphite processing plant built by Jinan Yuxiao Group has a total investment of about US\$150 million, with a planned annual output of 200,000 tonnes. Mozambican President Daniel Chapo said at the inauguration ceremony that the project would help shift the country away from a single development model based on raw material exports and promote higher value-added exports.

In the agricultural sector, cooperation continues to deepen. In Gaza Province, the Wanbao rice farm, backed by the China-Africa Development Fund, has boosted rice production through cooperation with local farmers, increasing yields from 1-2 tonnes per hectare to 5-7 tonnes per hectare, thus improving land use efficiency by about 10-fold.

China's senior agricultural experts group in Mozambique is another key component of bilateral cooperation. Agronomist Germano



Wu Guiyun (left), a member of the fourth Chinese agricultural mission to Mozambique, teaches seed breeding techniques to a local technician at the Umbeluzi Agricultural Station in Maputo Province last month. – Xinhua

Manuel of the Agricultural Research Institute of Mozambique said that with support from Chinese experts, a seed laboratory has been established for seed quality evaluation.

"When seed quality improves, agricultural output naturally increases," he said, adding that such technologies are expected to be gradually promoted nationwide to enhance Mozambique's overall agricultural capacity.

Driven by both policy support and market forces, China-

Mozambique economic and trade cooperation continues to expand, helping Mozambique upgrade industrial chains and inject sustained momentum into development.

## EXCHANGES CEMENT FRIENDSHIP

This year marks the China-Africa Year of People-to-People Exchanges. China-Mozambique cultural ties boast a long history and continue to yield new outcomes in the new era.

Since 1976, China has dispatched 26 medical teams to Mozambique. This decades-long health cooperation has become one of the most people-centered aspects of bilateral relations.

Chen Jialei, head of the 26<sup>th</sup> Chinese medical team to Mozambique, said the team has carried out multiple free medical consultations in Mozambique.

"These are practical actions to serve communities and safeguard lives, while also helping enhance local healthcare capacity and promote the building of a global community of health for all," he said.

Language serves as a bridge between civilizations. Since its establishment in 2012, the Confucius Institute at Eduardo Mondlane University has provided Chinese language training, enabling local youth to broaden people-to-people exchanges between the two countries.

Motivated by an interest in Chinese martial arts, Moisés Francisco, a young Mozambican, joined Chinese language training, later studied in China, and returned to become a teacher at the Confucius Institute.

"For Mozambican youth, learning Chinese often means more job opportunities and the possibility of realizing their dreams," he said.

– Xinhua

## When Portugal meets TCM intelligent robot

LISBON - Suzana Carvalho, a resident in the Portuguese capital of Lisbon, stood before a robot that looked like a sleek vending unit.

About five minutes later, she smiled holding a steaming cup of herbal beverage tailored to improve her health condition after accepting a brief scan and answering a list of questions from the robot.

"It's incredible," Carvalho said. "I've always been curious about traditional Chinese medicine [TCM], but I didn't expect it to be so advanced."

It took place on Friday at the Instituto Universitário Egas Moniz in Lisbon where medical professionals from China and Portugal, alongside faculty and students, gathered to witness the robot's debut on the campus.

The robot was developed jointly by the Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST) and the Guangdong Provincial Laboratory of Traditional Chinese Medicine.

It combines intelligent hardware with a specialized TCM model developed in Hengqin, alongside advanced AI technologies such as DeepSeek, according to the project's leader Han Zitian, a professor at the MUST School of Innovation Engineering.

Han said the robot can store up to 1,300 prescriptions, most drawn from classic TCM formulas



Suzana Carvalho, a local resident, holds a cup of herbal beverage tailored for her by a traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) intelligent robot at the Instituto Universitário Egas Moniz in Lisbon on Friday. Medical professionals from China and Portugal, alongside faculty and students, gathered to witness a TCM intelligent robot's debut on Friday. – Xinhua

and pre-vetted by experienced practitioners.

With health data gathered by built-in cameras, a pulse-sensing device and a question list, the robot can work out a personalized herbal formula and offer a tea-like drink, a seamless "consultation-to-consumption" experience.

The robot has become a great hit on the campus in Lisbon and has been surrounded by crowds. Its stock of ingredients was used up within just two to three hours after its debut.

"The popularity is beyond our expectation," said José João Mendes, president of the institute.

"It gives us greater confidence in expanding the collaboration with Chinese partners in this field."

Cooperation between Chinese and Portuguese institutions has been promoted recently in various fields, from joint laboratories and academic programs to clinical practice and professional training.

Looking ahead, Han said the team hopes to introduce more advanced versions of the robot with expanded diagnostic capabilities to Portugal, with Portugal's regulatory approval, to make TCM more accessible and serve the public abroad more efficiently. – Xinhua

SPRINGER NATURE palgrave macmillan

### The Palgrave Handbook on Geopolitics of Brazil and the South Atlantic

The Palgrave Handbook on Geopolitics of Brazil and the South Atlantic, published in 2025 as part of the Palgrave Major Reference Works series, currently stands as a key reference work in the fields of geopolitics, international politics, and strategic studies. The volume brings together contributions from international scholars addressing central themes such as diplomacy, security, political economy, maritime governance, and South-South cooperation.

Edited by Leandro F. J. B. S., Rodrigo F. Frogeri, Yichao Li, Francisco P. Garcia, and Aldair R. Almeida Silva, the handbook represents a largescale collaborative effort involving more than 200 contributors, including researchers, reviewers, editors, and project advisors. It has already surpassed 11,000 accesses, reflecting its significant international reach and its relevance not only for academic audiences but also for policymakers and diplomats. Further enhancing its importance is the preface written by Celso Amorim, a leading figure in Brazilian diplomacy and former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defense.

Reference (APA):  
 Leandro, F. J. B. S., Frogeri, R. F., Li, Y., Garcia, F. P., & Almeida Silva, A. R. (Eds.). (2025). *The Palgrave Handbook on Geopolitics of Brazil and the South Atlantic*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-95-1168-6>  
 Link: <https://link.springer.com/book/9789819511686>

## England beat Iceland to stay perfect in Women's World Cup qualifying



PARIS – Alessia Russo scored the only goal to earn England a 1-0 victory in Iceland on Saturday and a fourth win in as many 2027 Women's World Cup qualifying games.

The Arsenal striker picked out the far corner with a precise low shot midway through the first half in Reykjavik after an excellent burst from Lauren Hemp, who supplied the pass for Russo.

The Lionesses were also indebted to goalkeeper Hannah Hampton for three crucial saves in the second half, which preserved England's 100 percent record and kept them three points clear of Spain.

Two-time European champions England moved above Spain in Group A3 earlier in the week after beating the World Cup holders 1-0 at Wembley. Only the top team progresses automatically to the tournament in Brazil next year.

"The most important thing is that we have played four and have 12 points. No game is easy, we don't take anything for granted and we're in a really good position," England boss Sarina Wiegman told ITV.

"We know how good Spain are, and Ukraine too.

"I am happy with six points (from this week's two fixtures). The players go back to very important games with their clubs and then we go again in June."

### Spain cruise as France held

Edna Imade netted two headers as Spain crushed Ukraine 5-0 in Cordoba.

Spain roared into an immediate lead through Bayern Munich striker Imade. She powered home a fine header from Lucia Corrales's cross before 90 seconds had passed.

Spain were without injured three-time Ballon d'Or winner Aitana Bonmati, but her Barcelona teammate Alexia Putellas ran the show from midfield.

The visitors almost levelled before the break when Olha Ovdychuk fired against the post.

Spain's second goal was a carbon copy of the first, with Corrales crossing from the left and Imade nodding home just over a minute into the second half.

Salma Paralluelo hit the post before Maria Mendez headed home the third from Barcelona teenager Vicky Lopez's cross.

Eva Navarro notched Spain's fourth with a deflected effort from the edge of the area and Lopez showed neat footwork before tapping home the fifth.

"I think we could have scored even more goals... coaches always want to improve," said coach Sonia Bermudez.

"The plan was to use the flanks and with Edna, she's got the power that allows her to do damage."

Spain host England in Mallorca on June 5, a game they likely have to win if they want to qualify directly and avoid the play-offs.

"Now we'll take a breath and then start thinking about England," added Bermudez.

France are playing catch-up to the Netherlands in Group A2 after a 1-1 draw in Auxerre. France took the lead late in the first half through Marie-Antoinette Katoto, but the Dutch levelled when Wieke Kaptein scored with 14 minutes to play.

The Netherlands are top on eight points, having beaten France 2-1 at home on Tuesday. Les Bleues are a point behind, while the Republic of Ireland have fought their way back into contention with two wins over Poland this week.

Germany dropped their first points in Group A4 after drawing 0-0 away to neighbours Austria. Norway are just a point behind after Signe Gaupset grabbed a stoppage-time winner in a 3-2 victory in Slovenia.

Leaders Denmark were held 0-0 at home by Italy in Group A1, which allowed Sweden to close to within a point after a 1-0 win over Serbia.

– AFP

## Nagelsmann backs injured Gnabry as World Cup doubts grow

### Bayern win 35<sup>th</sup> Bundesliga title



MUNICH – Germany coach Julian Nagelsmann yesterday threw his support behind Bayern Munich forward Serge Gnabry, who could miss the World Cup with injury.

Late on Saturday, Bayern announced Gnabry would be out for an "extended period" with an adductor strain.

The Bundesliga champions in waiting did not indicate how long Gnabry could be out for.

Several German media sources reported yesterday the one-time Arsenal forward would be out for two to three months which would mean missing the World Cup which starts on June 11.

"I feel very sorry for Serge. This is particularly bitter news at the end of the season, with so many big and important matches coming up," Nagelsmann said in a statement to AFP subsidiary SID.

The coach, who also managed Gnabry while in charge of Bayern, said he spoke with the 30-year-old on Saturday once the diagnosis was clear.

"I told him that we in the national team are all behind him. We will all support him in the best way possible so that he can get back on the pitch as soon as possible."

Gnabry has returned to form this season in a firing Bayern front line alongside Harry Kane, Michael Olise and Luis Diaz.



FC Bayern Munich's team celebrates after winning the German first division Bundesliga football match against VfB Stuttgart as well as the Bundesliga title in Munich, southern Germany, yesterday.

– AFP

Bayern are through to the semi-finals of the Champions League and German Cup and won the Bundesliga yesterday.

In 21 league games this season, he has eight goals and seven assists and was considered a certainty to make Nagelsmann's World Cup squad if fit.

Harry Kane scored his 32<sup>nd</sup> goal of the

campaign as Bayern Munich came from behind to beat Stuttgart 4-2 and claim a record-extending 35<sup>th</sup> Bundesliga title.

Raphael Guerreiro, Nicolas Jackson and Alphonso Davies joined Kane on the scoresheet, while Chris Fuehrich and Chema Andres scored for the visitors as Bayern won the title with four matches to spare. – AFP

## Haaland gives Man City edge over Arsenal in Premier League title showdown

Kieran Canning



MANCHESTER – Manchester City are breathing down Arsenal's necks after Erling Haaland's strike beat the Gunners 2-1 yesterday to land a potentially decisive blow in the Premier League title race.

Pep Guardiola's men close to within three points of the leaders and have a game in hand with momentum firmly in their favour as Arsenal's quest for a first league title in 22 years unravels.

Defeat to City in the League Cup final last month has sparked a run of one win in six games in all competitions for Mikel Arteta's men, including four consecutive defeats in domestic competitions.

Victory over relegation-bound Burnley on Wednesday will take City top for the first time this year.

After finishing second for the past three seasons, Arsenal are at risk of seeing another huge chance to end their long wait to be champions of England slip away.

But they will also rue their luck after twice hitting the post, either side of Haaland's winner in the second half.

After Rayan Cherki's stunning solo effort opened the scoring, City gifted the visitors a route back into the game when Kai Havertz charged down Gianluigi Donnarumma's attempted clearance to equalise.

But the difference in quality up front proved the difference.

Haaland pounced to sweep in his 34<sup>th</sup> goal of the season 25 minutes from time before Havertz headed over a glorious chance deep into stoppage time.

Guardiola's men looked to prey on Arsenal's anxiety in a blistering start.

Cherki's deflected shot then came back off the post and City claims for a penalty against

Gabriel Magalhaes for handball were ignored.

The visitors were just starting to gain a foothold when a moment of magic from Cherki prised open the Gunners' notoriously mean defence.

The French international danced through challenges from Gabriel and Declan Rice before coolly slotting in the bottom corner.

However, Arsenal were handed an immediate lifeline thanks to Donnarumma's disaster.

The giant Italian was the scourge of Arteta's men when playing for Paris Saint-Germain in last season's Champions League semi-finals.

But he handed them a gift as he dallied and allowed Havertz to charge down his attempted clearance into the top corner.

The nature of the equaliser knocked City off their stride and it took until Guardiola's half-time team talk for the hosts to regain control.

Haaland should have scored when he hit the post after Arsenal failed to clear a corner.

But then came two moments which will haunt Arsenal if they fail to end their long wait to win the title.

Donnarumma redeemed himself with a massive save when one-on-one with Havertz before Martin Odegaard's follow-up effort was hooked off the line by Matheus Nunes.

Moments later Eberechi Eze hit the inside of the post and saw the ball roll agonisingly along the line rather than into Donnarumma's net.

City pounced on their moment of fortune to retake the lead.

Haaland outmuscled Gabriel to meet Nico O'Reilly's cross and hooked past David Raya.

Arsenal were denied by the woodwork once more when Gabriel's header deflected off O'Reilly onto the post and Havertz failed to turn in the rebound.

Gabriel was then lucky to stay on the field after an attempted headbutt on Haaland received only a yellow card.

But they had the chance to level when Havertz connected sweetly with Leandro Trossard's cross, but could not keep his header down.

Arteta fell the ground in disbelief but now has the job of trying to raise his players for their final five games of the campaign.

Arsenal have on paper the kinder run-in but appear to have run out of steam when it matters once more.

### Liverpool snatch derby win

Virgil van Dijk scored a last-gasp winner against Everton yesterday as Liverpool strengthened their push for a Champions League spot next season.

On a pivotal day in the English top division, fourth-placed Aston Villa squandered a two-goal lead against Sunderland but scored in stoppage time to win 4-3.

At the other end of the table, Morgan Gibbs-White netted a hat-trick as struggling Nottingham Forest came from behind against Burnley to win 4-1 and heap the pressure on troubled Tottenham.

Just a few weeks ago the battle for the top five, which guarantees entry into the Champions League, looked as though it might be tight.

But fifth-placed Liverpool's 2-1 victory in their first match at Everton's new Hill Dickinson Stadium takes them seven points clear of stumbling Chelsea, in sixth spot. – AFP

# Rampant S Africa tame Argentina to win HK Sevens at last

Peter Stebbings



HONG KONG – South Africa finally broke their duck by winning the Hong Kong Sevens for the first time as they overwhelmed title-holders Argentina 35-7 yesterday to celebrate the showpiece event's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday in style.

A dominant New Zealand took the women's crown, their 19-14 win over old rivals Australia giving them a fourth Hong Kong title in a row.

It was the climax of three days of breathless rugby and partying in increasingly sweaty temperatures at a raucous Kai Tak Stadium.

Fireworks erupted into the night sky to bring the curtain down on Hong Kong's biggest annual party.

South Africa, the regular-season champions, had been beaten in four previous Hong Kong finals since making their debut in southern China in 1993.

"Special, we've been searching for this one," two-try final hero Selwyn Davids told AFP.



The New Zealand women (left) and South Africa men teams celebrate with their trophies on the podium after winning their cup finals matches on the third day of the 2026 Rugby Sevens Hong Kong tournament at Kai Tak Stadium in Hong Kong yesterday. – AFP

"A first time to win in Hong Kong, that's an amazing feeling."

South Africa came into yesterday's final as favourites and delivered emphatically in front of a packed crowd at the futuristic

50,000-capacity arena.

Some of Argentina's players were in tears at the pre-match national anthem, and they fell behind within the first minute as Tristan Leyds raced away to score

and then converted himself.

Argentina struck back through Santino Zangara, only for Davids to restore the Blitzboks' lead.

They twisted the knife in the second half, Ryan Oosthuizen, Shilton van Wyk and Davids all going over.

"It's amazing to score, but all thanks to the team, they put me in the position to score," said the 32-year-old Davids.

"They are amazing, not only the 13 guys here, but everyone in the system, the guys that are pushing us back home to give our all.

"We know that if we don't perform, they are going to get the chance to play."

## Always in control

In the women's main event, Olympic champions New Zealand were hot favourites to defend their crown successfully once again.

They faced Australia in a repeat of last year's final, with Mahina Paul, Jorja Miller and Kelsey Teneti all scoring.

Isabella Nasser went over for Australia in the first half and then Maddison Levi late on, but New Zealand were always in control.

The Hong Kong Sevens is the first of three events in a new format in which teams compete for the season-ending world championship.

The next leg is in Spain's Valladolid on May 29-31 before the grand finale in Bordeaux, France, on June 5-7.

Hong Kong is regarded as the "jewel in the crown" of sevens rugby because of its long history stretching back to 1976 and its immense popularity.

The first Hong Kong Sevens took place in front of a few thousand curious spectators, and some of the players wore gym shoes in the mud instead of rugby boots.

Fast forward half a century and it has grown into a sold-out three-day festival of global repute mixing sport with socialising and big business.

– AFP

## Tennis serves

### Kostyuk wins all-Ukrainian WTA duel for Rouen title

ROUEN – Top seed Marta Kostyuk won an all-Ukrainian duel for the WTA title in Rouen yesterday with a straight sets win over Veronika Podrez.

The 23-year-old Kostyuk won 6-3, 6-4 in the first WTA final between two Ukrainian players.

She succeeded countrywoman Elina Svitolina, who won in Rouen last year as the top seed.

For 19-year-old qualifier Podrez, ranked 209<sup>th</sup> in the world, it was a first final in her main draw debut at a tour level event.

Both Kostyuk and Podrez struggled on their serve in the indoor clay final, hitting 12 double faults between them.

But Kostyuk converted six of her nine break point opportunities compared to Podrez, who converted four of seven in the tie which lasted 1hr 12min.

Kostyuk claimed her second

WTA singles title and first in more than three years since her victory in Austin, Texas in 2023. – AFP

### Fils wins on Barcelona clay with French Open looming

BARCELONA – Up-and-coming Frenchman Arthur Fils beat Russian Andrey Rublev 6-2, 7-6 (7/2) to lift the Barcelona clay-court title yesterday with Roland Garros just a month away.

The 21-year-old Fils returned from an eight-month injury absence in February and has been in strong form, finishing as runner-up to Carlos Alcaraz in Doha, before breezing to a fourth trophy of his career yesterday.

The result will make him France's top-ranked male player after showing poise and maturity to negotiate his way to this ATP 500 title, including fighting from a set down to beat Spanish hope Rafael Jodar in the semi-final.

Yesterday, he went 2-0 down

in the first set before finding his serve and a flurry of winning shots to win the first set 6-2, unnerving the 28-year-old Rublev.

In the second set, he blew three tournament points to avoid a tie-break, where he had Rublev running around, and took it comfortably 7-2.

"It was all in my head at the end. I played very well for a set and a half, but the pressure of the title caught up with me," he said of the match points that slipped away.

"At the end, I told myself I just had to put the ball in, and it paid off."

Yannick Noah was the last Frenchman to win Roland Garros in 1983, and Fils will be in the spotlight with the 2026 tournament starting on May 18.

French open champion Alcaraz pulled out of the Barcelona tournament with a wrist problem midweek.

– AFP

## S Korea unveils plan to bring back F1

F1

SEOUL – South Korea wants to host a Formula One race for the first time since 2013 after unveiling a new circuit design that officials say is financially viable.

The plan would see races held on a five-kilometre street circuit in the city of Incheon, just outside the capital Seoul, although the idea is still in its infancy and faces several obstacles.

The Korean Grand Prix was part of the Formula One calendar at a different circuit in the south of the country from 2010 but was axed after three years because of costs and tepid interest locally.

Incheon city officials said

Thursday their new plan can bring in money and they hope to draw up to 400,000 visitors over the three-day race weekend.

Incheon Mayor Yoo Jeong-bok told reporters they are ambitiously aiming to stage the first race in 2028.

The track design was developed after looking at street circuits in Singapore and Las Vegas.

"It is possible to link the F1 Grand Prix, which has developed into a form of entertainment, with K-culture," the plan says.

"We expect to hold various cultural performances, such as inviting world-famous artists, to elevate Incheon's cultural and tourism infrastructure to a world-class standard."

Formula One currently holds races in 24 locations around the world, including China, Japan and Singapore.

Vietnam was set to stage a race in 2020 but the event was cancelled because of the COVID-19 pandemic and has not appeared on the calendar since.

Thailand last year approved a bid to host a race.

F1 declined to comment on the South Korean plan.

Any plan to host the sport again would need to pass numerous hurdles including approval from the central government, finding a promoter and securing a spot in the densely packed calendar.

– AFP



Riders compete during the race 2 of WorldSSP at the FIM Superbike World Championship in Assen, the Netherlands, yesterday. – Xinhua

## Rinku blitz leads Kolkata to first win of IPL season



KOLKATA –

Rinku Singh hit an unbeaten 53 to lead Kolkata Knight Riders to their first win of the IPL season as they beat Rajasthan Royals by four wickets in a low-scoring contest yesterday.

Rajasthan posted 155-9 as their batting faltered after 15-year-old Vaibhav Sooryavanshi top-scored with 46 at Kolkata's Eden Gardens.

Kolkata, who had five defeats and one point from a rained-off game coming into the match, slipped to 5-2 and 85-6 before the left-handed Rinku steered the team home with two balls to spare.

Rinku smacked five fours and two sixes in his 34-ball knock and put on an unbeaten 76-run stand with number eight Anukul Roy, who made 29, to steer the team home.

The left-handed Roy kept calm with his senior partner as he hit a six off Jofra Archer in the 19<sup>th</sup> over and Kolkata needed nine from the final six balls.

Rinku, who was dropped on eight by Nandre Burger, hit two fours and a winning six as he raised his fifty to bring cheer to the dugout and home crowd.

England pace bowler Archer had Tim Seifert bowled for a duck on the first ball of the chase and South Africa's Burger dismissed skipper Ajinkya Rahane for nought to make it two down.

Kolkata's big-buy Cameron Green looked fluent in his 27 off 13 balls but fell stumped off Ravi Bishnoi with wicketkeeper Dhruv Jurel making a wide collection and a back flip onto the stumps.

Wickets kept tumbling with Ravindra Jadeja claiming two but Rinku made the most of his early reprieve to get three-time champions Kolkata over the line.

Earlier, Rajasthan started strongly with openers Yashasvi Jaiswal, who made 39, and T20 sensation Sooryavanshi, who bounced back from a golden duck in the previous game to hammer six fours and two sixes in his 28-ball knock, putting on 81 for the first wicket.

Spinner Varun Chakravarthy took down the left-handed Sooryavanshi and returned figures of 3-14 to trigger a collapse.

Fast bowler Kartik Tyagi took three key wickets and Sunil Narine claimed 2-26.

– AFP

# Top takeaways from CinemaCon: the year's hottest movies

Paula Ramon

LAS VEGAS – Hollywood's major studios brought their biggest movies to Las Vegas last week for CinemaCon, the annual industry summit that offers insiders a sneak peek at what's coming soon to cinemas.

Tom Cruise, Michael B. Jordan, Nicole Kidman, Tom Hanks, Zendaya and Timothee Chalamet led the parade of A-listers onto the stage at the Colosseum in Caesars Palace, along with directors Steven Spielberg and Christopher Nolan.

Attendees caught a glimpse of new trailers, clips and teasers. Here are the highlights from the convention:

## 'The Odyssey'

Nolan debuted epic footage from "The Odyssey," his hotly anticipated take on Homer's epic tale – and his first movie since his Oscar-winning "Oppenheimer."

The clips featured a look at Matt Damon as Odysseus and Charlize Theron as Calypso, as well as the scene when the iconic Trojan Horse is revealed – which generated major buzz among industry observers.

"Why 'The Odyssey'?" "The Odyssey" is a story that has fascinated generation after generation for 3,000 years," Nolan told the audience at the Universal Pictures event.

"It's not A story. It's THE story," the filmmaker added, explaining that it was a long-time dream to make this adaptation.

Zendaya, Tom Holland, Anne Hathaway and Robert Pattinson also star in the film, which is set for release on July 17.

## 'Disclosure Day'

Spielberg presented an extended new look at "Disclosure Day," his return to sci-fi and extraterrestrials, a genre he first explored nearly 50 years ago.

Though the Oscar-winning director said he had never seen an unidentified flying object himself, he made "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" (1977) because the phenomenon offered him "a really great story to tell."

"I made 'Disclosure Day' with a lot more certainty that there's more truth than fiction in the movie that you are going to see on June 12."

Emily Blunt, Josh O'Connor and Colman Domingo star in a film that forces humanity to contend with evidence that aliens do exist.

Spielberg, who presented the Universal Pictures movie with Domingo, said he'd been extremely selective in what he wanted to reveal at the event.

"This movie is an experience, and



UK-US filmmaker Christopher Nolan promotes the upcoming film "The Odyssey" at the Universal Pictures and Focus Features presentation at The Dolby Colosseum at Caesars Palace during CinemaCon, the official convention of Cinema United, last Wednesday in Las Vegas, Nevada. – AFP

all you need to get from the beginning to the end is a seatbelt," he said.

## 'Avengers: Doomsday'

Disney's Marvel Studios unveiled the first trailer for "Avengers: Doomsday," which will

hit US cinemas on December 18.

The clip, which earned thunderous applause from the crowd, offered the first look at Robert Downey Jr. as villain Doctor Doom – a new franchise character for the actor, whose Iron Man died in "Avengers: Endgame."

It also featured scenes with Thor (Chris Hemsworth) and Steve Rogers (Chris Evans), whose Captain America had chosen to remain in the past in "Endgame," passing on his shield. It's not clear yet how Cap has returned.

Downey and Evans were on hand to reveal the footage, along with director Joe and Anthony Russo.

"I said I would only come back if there was a real reason," Evans told the crowd.

"And in 'Doomsday', there is a very real reason that these heroes need Steve Rogers."

## 'Dune: Part Three'

Warner Bros showed the opening minutes of Denis Villeneuve's "Dune: Part Three," which is also set to open on December 18.

"DunesDay" could be the biggest day in movie cinemas since "Barbie" and "Oppenheimer" debuted simultaneously, creating the "Barbenheimer" phenomenon.

Villeneuve called the final

chapter in his sci-fi trilogy – which takes place 17 years after the end of the last film – a "thriller – action-packed, more intense and definitely more emotional."

Chalamet and Zendaya were on hand, along with Jason Momoa, for the presentation.

Zendaya reflected on the changes that the characters had been through, saying it had been "an unkind few years, and I think there's so much left still to fight for."

## 'Digger'

Cruise and Oscar-winning Mexican filmmaker Alejandro Gonzalez Iñárritu offered a first look at the comedy "Digger," with the actor virtually unrecognisable as a pot-bellied oil man who ruined the planet and now wants to repair it.

"The movie is wild, it's funny," said Cruise, who received a standing ovation from the packed room at the Warner Bros event.

Iñárritu said the role "could possibly be the most challenging" for Cruise, who has been nominated for three Oscars for his acting performances.

"We know that he's fearless – the stunts, the planes, the jumps – but I have to say embodying this character, this is another kind of fearless," he said. – AFP

## Hollywood, Silicon Valley turn out for the 'Oscars of Science'

Paula RAMON

LOS ANGELES – Big names from the worlds of film, technology, music and sports gathered on Saturday in Santa Monica, California for the Breakthrough Prizes, popularly known as the "Oscars of Science."

The awards, co-founded by philanthropists and tech entrepreneurs, recognise the research achievements of leading scientists around the world in three broad categories: Life Sciences, Fundamental Physics and Mathematics.

"These are some of the most heroic and inspiring people we get in the world," US actor Edward Norton told AFP.

According to the "American History X" star, it was important to turn out and "to highlight what this kind of work contributes to all of us."

"The United States has the most anti-science administration in US history," the actor said. "It's always important, but if it was ever especially important, the moment is now."

In the last year, the Trump administration has slashed funding for science, halting projects and devastating workforces.

US rock climber Alex Honnold agreed with Norton, adding that he hoped the fluctuations "of the political climate... are short-term compared to the long-term effort required to make these kinds of gains in human knowledge."

OpenAI CEO Sam Altman

said the collaboration between his company's artificial intelligence (AI) technology and some of the award-winning scientists "is moving things faster and faster, and letting them discover new things and bring them to the world faster than they could before."

"Change this fast is really disorienting. So there will be a lot of big questions that we'll have to sort through as a society," Altman told AFP.

The Breakthrough Foundation was started by Google co-founder Sergey Brin; Mark Zuckerberg and his wife Priscilla Chan; science patrons Julia and Yuri Milner; and Anne Wojcicki, CEO of 23andMe.

Six prizes worth US\$3 million each were presented at the 12th edition of the awards.

French mathematician Frank Merle was honoured for his work on nonlinear equations describing the behaviour of waves, fluids and other systems.

Merle told AFP the funding was "essential" for science.

"Science is one of the foundations of our civilisation," he said.

Hollywood A-listers Ben Affleck, Lily Collins, Robert Downey Jr., Gigi Hadid, Anne Hathaway, Jessica Chastain, Gal Gadot, Naomi Watts and her husband, Billy Crudup, also attended the event, alongside public figures like Bill Gates and Paris Hilton.

– AFP

## French film star Nathalie Baye dead at 77

PARIS – French film star Nathalie Baye, a multi-César Award winner who starred in Steven Spielberg's "Catch Me if You Can," has died at the age of 77, her family told AFP on Saturday.

Baye, a stalwart of French cinema, starred in some 80 films and took home the best actress César – France's equivalent of the Oscars – four times, including three years running from 1981 to 1983.

She died on Friday at her home in Paris from Lewy body dementia, her family said.

The neurodegenerative disease can alter mood, movement and provoke hallucinations.

Baye's career saw a late surge of internationally high-profile roles, including playing Leonardo DiCaprio's mother in "Catch Me if You Can" and a French aristocrat in "Downton Abbey 2".

She also worked with Canadian wunderkind Xavier Dolan, who cast her as one of his many difficult mothers in "Laurence Anyways" and "It's Only the End of the World".

"Une liaison pornographique" – whose English title was the more demure "An Affair of Love" – won her the best actress prize at the Venice film festival.

Baye had a five-year relationship with rocker Johnny Hallyday, dubbed the "French Elvis", whose death in 2017 sparked national mourning.

Their daughter Laura Smet is also a famous actress, who starred alongside Baye as a mock version of themselves – bickering, competitive, yet very close – in the



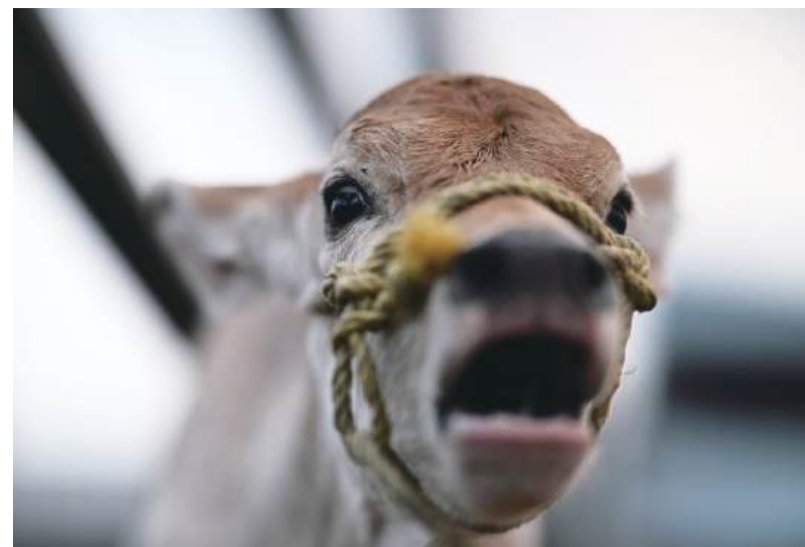
French actress Nathalie Baye poses on May 19, 2016 during a photocall for the film "It's Only The End Of The World ("Juste La Fin Du Monde")" at the 69th Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. – AFP

hit series "Call My Agent!".

Baye was born in 1948 in Normandy to bohemian parents who were both painters. But struggling with dyslexia, she left school at 14 and went to Monaco to learn dance.

Her breakthrough came in the 1970s when she teamed up with arthouse directors such as François Truffaut, Maurice Pialat and Claude Sautet, and then in the 1980s with Jean-Luc Godard. – AFP

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 9°C~23°C	Manila 23°C~35°C	New York 2°C~11°C	Lisbon 17°C~26°C
Shanghai 12°C~22°C	Bangkok 27°C~36°C	London 5°C~14°C	Rio de Janeiro 19°C~26°C
Hong Kong 22°C~28°C	Tokyo 15°C~23°C	Frankfurt 5°C~15°C	Luanda 24°C~30°C
Taipei 19°C~31°C	Singapore 24°C~32°C	Vancouver 11°C~21°C	Maputo 23°C~35°C
Guangzhou 22°C~29°C	Kuala Lumpur 24°C~33°C	Paris 5°C~17°C	Dili 24°C~30°C
Nanjing 10°C~19°C	Jakarta 23°C~33°C	Moscow 0°C~7°C	São Tomé 26°C~33°C
Guilin 17°C~24°C	Seoul 6°C~18°C	Las Vegas 17°C~32°C	Praia 19°C~27°C
Xi'an 9°C~18°C	Sydney 15°C~22°C	Monte Carlo 14°C~20°C	Bissau 20°C~35°C



**New best friend**

A child shakes hands with a robot dog at the 139<sup>th</sup> edition of the China Import and Export Fair in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, on Wednesday. — Xinhua

**Free me!**

A calf is seen tied up, ready to be sold or traded, at the municipal market known as the Tiangué in San Rafael Cedros, Cuscatlan department, El Salvador, on Saturday. — AFP



**Beaming sunflower**

A girl poses for photos at a flower fair in Huangpu District of Shanghai, on Saturday. The 2026 Shanghai International Flower Show opened on Saturday with events in two main venues, 10 sub-venues and multiple exhibition spots across the city. — Xinhua

**Centurions are back in town**

People take part in a parade in Rome, Italy to celebrate the city's 2,779<sup>th</sup> birthday, yesterday. The city of Rome holds various activities to celebrate the upcoming 2,779<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its legendary foundation with historical re-enactments of ancient Roman rituals. — Xinhua



**Sweet treats**

Chocolates are displayed during the Radovljica Chocolate Festival in Radovljica, Slovenia, yesterday. — Xinhua

**Flower horse**

People look at a float during the Flower Parade of the Bollenstreek in Bennebroek, the Netherlands, on Saturday. — Xinhua