

# Sam meets Portuguese ministers of justice, economy & territorial cohesion



Macau Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai (left) and Portugal's Minister of Justice Rita Júdice pose for a photo on the sidelines of their meeting in Lisbon yesterday morning (local time). – Photos courtesy of TDM



Macau Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai (left) shakes hands with Portugal's Minister of Economy and Territorial Cohesion Manuel Castro Almeida on the sidelines of their meeting in Lisbon yesterday afternoon (local time).

**Tony Wong**

Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai, who yesterday was on the third day of his four-day working visit to Portugal, separately met with two ministers in Lisbon yesterday, according to reports from Macau news media covering Sam's working visit.

Sam visited the Ministry of Justice yesterday morning (local time) where he met with Minister of Justice Rita Júdice. Both exchanged views on judicial and legal matters concerning both sides.

Afterwards, Sam visited the Ministry

of Economy and Territorial Cohesion yesterday afternoon (local time) where he met with Minister of Economy and Territorial Cohesion Manuel Castro Almeida, according to the reports.

Both meetings were also attended by Sam's chief-of-cabinet Chan Chak, and Chinese Ambassador to Portugal Yang Yirui, according to the reports.

Yesterday morning's meeting was also attended by Macau Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Wallis O Lam, while yesterday afternoon's meeting was also attended by Commerce and Investment

Promotion Institute (IPIM) President Che Weng Keong, according to the reports.

**Business conference aims to promote China-Portugal cooperation**

Meanwhile, a business and investment promotion conference for enterprises from Macau, the Chinese mainland, and Portugal was held in Lisbon yesterday morning (local time).

The conference, called Macau-Portugal Economic and Trade Cooperation Promotion Seminar, was organised by the MSAR

government's Commerce and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM), which is leading a business delegation comprising about 120 senior representatives from enterprises in Macau, Hengqin, and various other areas in the Chinese mainland, as part of Sam's working visit to Portugal and Spain.

About 300 business representatives and government officials from Macau, the Chinese mainland including Hengqin, and Portugal attended the business conference, which was held at MEO Arena, a multi-purpose indoor arena in Lisbon.

*Continued on p.12*

## Siemens warns EU risks falling behind on AI due to red tape

FRANKFURT AM MAIN – German industrial giant Siemens yesterday warned that the EU was falling behind on artificial intelligence (AI) and called on the bloc to speed up its adoption of the technology.

"If we want to be a leader in AI, especially in industry, we need to make extensive improvements. Otherwise, progress and growth will take place elsewhere – and our dependency will increase," a company spokesman told AFP.

The EU must better support the

"deployment" of AI in businesses as well as development of the technology, the spokesman said.

"It is precisely in the area of deployment that new legal uncertainty is currently emerging," he said, warning that additional regulation could lead to "duplicate assessments, contradictory requirements and unnecessary bureaucracy".

Siemens CEO Roland Busch earlier yesterday told the Bloomberg news agency that his company would prioritise

AI investments in the United States and China if the European Union does not ease regulations he considers too restrictive.

He argued in particular that the EU's AI Act and Data Act "miss the mark" by treating industrial AI like consumer applications.

"I can't explain to my shareholders why I'm investing money in an environment where I'm being held back," he said.

Under Busch, Siemens has pivoted from its traditional industrial base towards higher-margin software products, looking to

capitalise on data collection in order to help customers automate processes.

The Siemens spokesman said that the EU already had "a proven framework for safe industrial systems" in the form of the Machinery Regulation.

Speaking at the Hanover international trade fair on Sunday, Chancellor Friedrich Merz said he would work "to simplify European AI regulation".

"We can't go on like this," he said.

– AFP

Macau's most popular English-language newspaper – Your trustworthy source of news & views

The Macau Post Daily

**Xi says normal passage through Strait of Hormuz should be maintained**

President Xi Jinping yesterday said normal passage through the Strait of Hormuz should be maintained.

– Story on p. 5

**Netanyahu vows 'harsh action' against soldier vandalising Jesus statue in Lebanon**

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed "harsh action" yesterday on a soldier caught on camera vandalising a statue of Jesus Christ in southern Lebanon.

– Story on p. 10

**Pope Leo blasts 'exploitation' on visit to resource-rich Angola**

Pope Leo XIV condemned exploitation and graft by the rich and powerful yesterday during a visit to Angola's diamond-rich northeast, returning to a theme of his 11-day tour of Africa.

– Story on p. 12

## Police arrest 5 mainlanders for fraud, organised crime

Armindo Neves

The Judiciary Police (PJ) have arrested a gang of five men from the Chinese mainland for fraud and organised crime, PJ spokesman Cheong Siu Keong said during a special press conference yesterday.

Cheong identified the quintet as surnamed Feng, Zhou, Zhao, Zhang, and Xie. He noted that Zhou and Xie claimed to be an online seller and a delivery driver, respectively, while the other three claimed that they were unemployed.

According to Cheong, the Judiciary Police last month received two separate reports from two males from the Chinese mainland who claimed to have received eight and six HK\$1,000 (1,030 patacas) prop banknotes\*, respectively, after exchanging yuan into Hong Kong dollars at a casino in Zape.

Cheong did not reveal the exact date when the police received both reports.

According to Cheong, police officers intercepted a suspect surnamed Feng at the scene, who was subsequently transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP). Further investigations led the police to identify a total of four more suspects involved in the case.

At midnight on Friday last week, PJ officers discovered that the four suspects had re-entered Macau via the Barrier Gate checkpoint and gathered at a residential unit in Iao Hon district. At midday on Saturday, the quartet went to a casino in Zape, where one of them, Xie, exchanged yuan into HK\$20,000 for a female mainland tourist, Cheong said.

When the woman took the

banknotes to the casino cage, she discovered that 10 of them were prop banknotes. As the transfer of funds was only to take place after the exchange was confirmed, the woman suffered no financial loss, Cheong added.

PJ officers intervened immediately and arrested the four suspects. During a search of the flat in Iao Hon, they discovered 45 additional prop banknotes of the same type. Combined with the 10 used in the attempted exchange, a total of 55 prop notes were seized.

Upon examination, Cheong stated that the prop banknotes lacked security features such as watermarks or reflective elements; he added that several notes shared the same serial numbers and were clearly printed with the word "PROP".

Cheong described Zhou as the gang's core member, while Xie was responsible for transporting the prop notes from the Chinese mainland to Macau, receiving 1,000 yuan (1,190 patacas) per trip.

Four members of the gang were transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) yesterday, each facing charges of fraud and organised crime.

Meanwhile, Cheong also noted that the flat in Iao Hon is suspected of operating as an illegal guesthouse, and the matter has been reported to the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) for follow-up action. ■

\*This motion picture term covers everything from high-quality replicas used in close-ups to "filler" stacks used in background shots. – Gemini



Judiciary Police (PJ) officers escort the hooded suspects to a PJ vehicle outside the PJ headquarters in Zape yesterday. – Photo: Armindo Neves

## Pharma Bureau orders recall of calcium supplement batch

Khalel Vallo

The Pharmaceutical Administration Bureau (ISAF) has ordered the recall of a batch of a calcium supplement after tests found discrepancies in its vitamin D content, urging residents to stop using the affected product, according to a statement by the bureau on Friday.

According to the statement, the product involved is "DIETARY SUPPLEMENT NUTRA CALCIUM 600 PLUS VITAMIN D 200 IU" (batch number 51194), manufactured by Earth's Creation USA.

Laboratory testing revealed that the actual vitamin D content in the batch exceeded the labelled amount of 200 IU, though it did not surpass internationally recognised daily safety limits, the statement said, adding that the product was also found to contain trace amounts of ethanol and ethyl acetate residues, within acceptable standards.

As the product did not meet registered quality specifications, authorities instructed importers to recall the batch and advised residents to immediately stop taking it, the statement said, noting that the supplement, an over-the-counter product used to support calcium and vitamin D intake, had been supplied to multiple healthcare facilities, including the Islands Healthcare Complex – Macao Medical Centre of Peking

Union Medical College Hospital (PUMCH), private hospitals, clinics, community pharmacies, and veterinary service providers.

All relevant institutions have been notified to cease distribution and use, the statement said, adding that the affected batch had also been dispensed through community pharmacies under agreements with the Health Bureau (SSM).

Supply has since been halted, and emergency measures have been activated to procure alternative products with the same ingredients and dosage for affected patients, the statement noted, underlining that details of replacement arrangements will be announced later.

Residents can contact the pharmacy department of the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre on 8390 3710 during office hours for enquiries, while those who obtained the product through other healthcare providers or pharmacies are advised to consult the relevant institutions for follow-up arrangements on 8598 3285 during office hours as well.

According to the Health Bureau, residents are advised to maintain adequate nutrient intake through a balanced diet or fortified milk products while discontinuing use of the supplement, and to seek medical advice if needed. ■



This undated handout photo provided by the Pharmaceutical Administration Bureau (ISAF) yesterday shows the "DIETARY SUPPLEMENT NUTRA CALCIUM 600 PLUS VITAMIN D 200 IU" (batch number 51194).

## Police arrest trio for 'drug party' in hotel guestroom

Armindo Neves

The Judiciary Police (PJ) arrested three suspects from the Chinese mainland for participating in a drug party in a hotel guestroom on Sunday, PJ spokesman Cheong Siu Keong said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Cheong identified the trio as a 54-year-old unemployed man surnamed Shi, a 39-year-old salesman surnamed Chen, and a 50-year-old unemployed man, also surnamed Chen.

According to Cheong, on Sunday morning, a member of staff at a hotel in Cotai discovered drug-taking paraphernalia while cleaning a guestroom, and the hotel manager immediately notified the Judiciary Police.

Upon arrival, with the assistance of hotel security, PJ officers intercepted the trio, Cheong said, adding that in the guestroom, PJ officers seized HK\$4,500 (4,630 patacas) and 1,100 yuan (1,300 patacas) in cash suspected to be proceeds from drug-related activities, two packets suspected to contain heroin, one packet suspected to contain crystal meth, as well as drug-taking paraphernalia including modified water bottles, aluminium foil, syringes, and lighters.

Upon testing the suspected



This undated handout photo provided by the Judiciary Police (PJ) yesterday shows evidence seized from the hotel guestroom booked by the drug-taking trio.

drugs, Cheong said, PJ officers confirmed the substances as heroin and crystal meth, adding that the trio's urine tests confirmed their drug use.

Cheong also said that the heroin weighed 1.42 grams and the crystal meth weighed 0.41 grams, adding that the total estimated street value of the seized drugs is around 3,200 patacas.

According to Cheong, the investigation revealed that the three suspects had a habit of drug

use, and that Shi had smuggled the drugs from the Chinese mainland into Macau, where he then used them with the two Chens in the guestroom. Shi entered Macau on Sunday, whilst the two Chens had arrived on Saturday, Cheong said.

The trio were transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) yesterday, each facing charges of drug-taking and possession of drug-taking paraphernalia; additionally, Shi faces a further charge of drug trafficking. ■

### Published since Aug 2004

- Director & Chief Editor – Harald Brüning
- Office Manager – Sally Cheong
- Marketing Manager – Kevin Cheung King Lok
- Managing Editor – Maria Cheung Ut Meng
- Editors – Lesley Wells, Johnny Un
- Senior Reporters – Tony Wong, Rui Pastorin
- Reporters – Khalel Vallo, William Chan, Ida Cheong, Armindo Neves
- Chief Graphic Designer – Simon Wang
- Graphic Designer – Colin Zhong
- Administrative Assistants – Ester Mak, Carl Leong
- Printed by Tipografia Welfare Lda., 82-86 Rua dos Pescadores
- Chatbots: DeepSeek, Gemini, Poe
- Wire services – AFP, Xinhua

### Macau Weather

CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY INTERVALS.

A FEW SHOWERS AT FIRST. FORCE 3 TO 4 SOUTHERLY WINDS.

RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 70% AND 95%.



24°C~29°C

Source: SMG

# Oxfam rice event marks 15<sup>th</sup> year, calls to support smallholders



Oxfam Hong Kong Deputy General Henry Tang Chi-fai addresses yesterday's press conference at the Macau Tower Convention and Entertainment Centre in Sai Van.

— Photo: Khalel Vallo

## Khalel Vallo

The annual Oxfam Rice Event 2026 will take place on May 16-17 across Macau, marking its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary, with organisers urging the public to support smallholders affected by climate change.

During a press conference held yesterday at the Macau Tower Convention and Entertainment Centre in Sai Van, Oxfam Hong Kong introduced this year's campaign under the theme "Empower Smallholder Farmers. Change Lives with an Oxfam Rice Packet".

The initiative aims to raise funds through the sale of rice and gift items to support vulnerable farming communities worldwide. Addressing the event, Oxfam Hong Kong Director General Henry Tang Chi-fai highlighted the growing impact of climate change on global food systems, noting that extreme weather continues to threaten livelihoods, particularly among low-income communities.

Tang said that Oxfam implements projects across the Chinese mainland, elsewhere in

Asia and East Africa to help farmers adopt sustainable practices and strengthen resilience. Meanwhile, local Oxfam ambassador Terence Siufay (徐智勇) also attended the press conference, encouraging residents to support the campaign. Siufay, a Macau-born actor, singer and businessman, said each pack of Oxfam rice represents hope for farmers and called on the community to turn care into action.

The two-day event will be held at 10 locations: Bank of China Macau (Hoi Keng Tin, Nova Grand and Villa de Mer branches), BCM Bank (main branch on Avenida da Praia Grande, and Prince Flower City branch), CTM TELECENTRO Concept Store, Flower City ParknShop Shopping Centre, Lisboeta Shopping Mall (outside the food court), Pui Ching Middle School Macau (Avenida de Horta e Costa), and Santa Teresa School

(Avenida do Conselheiro Borja).

Speaking to the media after the press conference, Tang elaborated on the role of technology in supporting agricultural development. He said that Oxfam is exploring advanced techniques, including artificial intelligence (AI), to assist farmers. "I think from our perspective, as always, we would like to see whether there are any technologically advanced techniques that can help the farmers". He added that AI-driven tools are already being considered to enhance climate resilience.

"In particular, earlier on is the climate, resilience, and techniques. Those are actually utilising data from the internet and at the same time using AI to do analytics so that we can have a bit more data to help the farmers when they prepare for disaster, awareness, and things like that", Tang said, adding that

"AI definitely will be one of the main components now and also in the future, helping us to alleviate poverty in the near future".

Organisers said the campaign not only raises funds but also aims to increase awareness of the challenges faced by smallholders, encouraging the local community to contribute to sustainable development and poverty alleviation efforts worldwide.

According to Google's AI chatbot Gemini, Oxfam is a global confederation of 21 independent non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working together in about 80 countries and regions to tackle the root causes of poverty and inequality. Founded in 1942 as the "Oxford Committee for Famine Relief," it has evolved from a small group of academics and activists providing wartime aid into one of the world's most influential humanitarian and advocacy bodies. ■



This infographic provided by Oxfam yesterday promotes the products for its two-day "Oxfam Rice Event 2026" across Macau next month.

## Sam meets Portuguese ministers of justice, economy & territorial cohesion

### Continued from p.1

Addressing the business conference, according to reports from Macau news media covering Sam's working visit, Che noted that as a commercial and trade cooperation service platform between China and Portuguese-speaking countries, Macau benefits from a continental European legal system compatible with Portugal, a low tax regime, and a well-developed financial system, enabling Macau to be the preferred gateway for Chinese mainland enterprises seeking to expand into Portuguese-speaking markets, as well as an excellent window for Portuguese companies entering the Chinese mainland market.

Moreover, as a core city in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), Macau offers convenient access to a vast market in the Chinese mainland, Che said.

Also addressing the conference, Portuguese Trade & Investment Agency (AICEP) CEO Madalena Oliveira e Silva said that Portugal expects to attract projects from the Chinese mainland and Macau that could bring strength, influence, productivity, technology, and quality-job creation, thereby promoting economic transformation in Portugal. She said that Portugal also expects the launch of new policies and measures that could help Portuguese companies and products enter the Chinese market.

Cao Jinfeng, a deputy director of the executive committee of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, also addressed the conference. He said that Hengqin will organise a sci-tech innovation competition this year for individuals and companies from Portugal and Spain, with a stronger emphasis on projects from the two countries in areas such as big health, green energy, advanced manufacturing, artificial intelligence (AI), cultural tourism, and modern agriculture.

Cao is also the president of the board of the Service Centre for Economy and Trade between China and Portuguese/Spanish-speaking Countries in Hengqin.

According to the reports, 43 business cooperation agreements were signed during yesterday's conference between enterprises from Portugal and China comprising those from Macau and the Chinese mainland including Hengqin, covering various fields such as sci-tech, conference and exhibition, and traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and big health.

Today, Sam is slated to meet with President António Seguro, Prime Minister Luis Montenegro and other senior representatives of the Portuguese Republic before departing to Madrid later in the day. His four-nation, 9-day European tour will also include visits to Geneva and Brussels. ■

## 'Echoes of India' gathers participants for activities, themed buffet

### Rui Pastorin

The "Echoes of India · Taste of Tradition Dinner Buffet" took place at Grand Coloane Resort on Saturday, with themed activities showcased in addition to a raft of delicacies.

Featuring Northern and Southern Indian specialties, along with beverages and desserts, the buffet was curated by Chef Nathi and his team, with a spread providing "a journey across India's diverse culinary regions" showcased at the resort's Café Panorama and Garden Lawn, according to a statement provided by the resort on Sunday.

Themed activities, music and cultural performances, as well as experiences including a themed art exhibition and those related to tea, also held during the day.

The event was presented in conjunction with the Consulate General of India in the Hong Kong & Macau SARs. The statement quoted Consul General Rajesh N. Naik as saying: "Events like this reflect the strong and vibrant connections between India and Macau, not only through history, but through people, culture, and shared

experiences today. Macau and Goa share deep-rooted cultural linkages, and in many ways, this celebration of Indian cuisine and traditions brings that connection to life".

Grand Coloane Resort General Manager Christian Buggelsheim was also quoted as saying: "The evening was not only about experiencing a different culture, but about creating genuine connections in a relaxed island setting. Seeing families and friends

enjoying the performances, sharing conversations, and taking part in the activities reflects exactly what we hope to achieve, meaningful moments that stay with our guests long after the evening ends".

Moreover, local Indian community representative and event consultant Aruna Jha said in the statement that it "was heartwarming to see the community come together and experience Indian culture in such an open and engaging way". ■



A performance takes place during the "Echoes of India · Taste of Tradition Dinner Buffet" hosted by Grand Coloane Resort on Saturday. — Photo: Grand Coloane Resort

## Colégio Dom Bosco (Yuet Wah) student exhibition presents colourful works

*Rui Pastorin*

Youngsters from Colégio Dom Bosco (Yuet Wah), or DBYW, are presenting a raft of works in an exhibition celebrating the local primary school's silver jubilee.

With five days left, the showcase of works for the DBYW 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Art Exhibition (鮑思高粵華小學25周年校慶視覺藝術展) is taking place at the Centre of Educational Resources located opposite Jardim de São Francisco (加思欄花園).

The colourful works showcased in the exhibition area were created by students as young as those in the first and second grades, with the event altogether highlighting art, creativity and beauty through the eyes of young children.

Among the exhibits are those that take on festive and vibrant red Chinese New Year themes and imagery, including their take on the Year of the Horse. Exhibitiongoers moving across the venue will also find various vibrant clay works on display that depict a range of ideas, alongside drawings, cardboard collages, painted masks, and 3D installations. While the works are all displayed inside the venue, passers-by may also get a glimpse of some of the art through the various window displays.

A recent statement about the exhibition issued by the school highlighted that each student transformed their classroom knowledge into "visible expression", interpreting beauty and their passion for learning using their brushes, scissors, clay, and creativity.

The statement said: "Small creative sparks are gathered into powerful collective masterpieces – reflecting the art philosophy of 'making the small grow' and demonstrating strong teamwork", adding that one of the exhibition's aims is to also carry children's understanding of the world and their hopes for the future.

A post on the school's Facebook page during the opening ceremony of the exhibition last month further noted that "every piece embodies the children's infinite imagination and pure vitality".

Continuing to highlight the creativity of youngsters throughout its remaining run, one can visit the exhibition at the centre's ground-floor Educational Multimedia Area from 10:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. from today through Friday, and, on the final day on Saturday from between 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. and between 2 p.m. and 5:40 p.m.



*Photos taken yesterday by Rui Pastorin*

## China's film studios eye IP-driven future as near-total reliance on box office comes under strain

Analysis by Xinhua writers Zhang Yunlong and Yang Shujun

BEIJING – China's major film studios are changing how they measure the value of a movie – moving away from a near-total dependence on theatrical ticket sales toward a broader model built on intellectual property (IP) development, licensing, and consumer experiences.

This shift was discussed at the industry forum of the 16<sup>th</sup> Beijing International Film Festival, where executives from Enlight Media, China Film Group and Shanghai Film Group highlighted strategies for building IP franchises that generate returns well beyond the multiplex.

Their discussions reflected a growing concern among China's leading studios that the old model – built almost entirely on box office revenue that has weakened from its 2019 peak – may no longer be sufficient to sustain the sector on its own.

Wang Changtian, chairman of Enlight Media, pointed out a structural imbalance that the industry faces. He said that studios are increasingly factoring non-theatrical value into their project decisions because box office revenue alone can no longer cover the investment in most films. By contrast, many leading Western studios have long derived the majority of their income from copyright licensing, merchandise and ancillary sources, with theatrical ticket sales representing a smaller share, he added.

In China, film copyright sales generate little income for rights holders – licensing conditions are onerous and prices are low – while merchandise revenue has yet to reach meaningful scale, Wang said. With both streams effectively absent, Chinese studios are left dependent on box office for more than 90 percent of their revenue – the very source that is now shrinking.

He predicted that the industry's film output would fall, with box office revenue becoming even more concentrated in blockbuster titles. However, some smaller, lower-cost films with genuinely original ideas may still find room to succeed, he added.

For China's established film studios, the response to such pressure is increasingly pointing toward building and managing IP across multiple revenue channels – with the film itself potentially recast as a starting point rather than an end product.

Wang said Enlight Media had spent the past year building an IP-centered operational structure, in which every content team functions simultaneously as IP creator and IP manager. On the animation front, the studio is currently planning dozens of film projects, many of which are conceived on development cycles of 20 or 30 years. He said Chinese companies should aspire to claim at least 20 of the world's 100 most valuable IPs.

Wang drew a comparison to the rise of China's car industry. "In terms of content, I believe we have a similar opportunity," he said. He noted, however, that commercial ambition alone could not deliver these goals. "Without imagination, creativity and the capacity for innovation, a good IP is simply not possible. Content remains the foundation of everything else."

Gao Shan, deputy general manager of China Film Group, offered a complementary perspective, drawing a

distinction between the function of genre films and that of IP. Genre films, he argued, establish audience trust through familiar formulas; IP operates on a different logic entirely.

"IP is about turning new acquaintances into old friends," Gao said. "At its core, it is a form of emotional connection and trust." He added that a durable IP rests on two foundations: a world-building capacity that sustains repeated storytelling, and characters that audiences genuinely remember.

China Film Group's science-fiction franchise "The Wandering Earth" has sustained that model since its debut in 2019, with the third installment scheduled for release during the Spring Festival holiday in 2027, Gao said.

Shanghai Film Group provided the forum's most concrete evidence that the model can work in practice. Wang Jun, the company's chairwoman, said the animated film "Nobody," released in August 2025, had generated total gross merchandise volume – a measure of total sales processed through its commercial partnerships – of 2.5 billion yuan, exceeding its theatrical box office of 1.72 billion yuan.

More than 800 co-branded products were developed before the film's release, spanning categories from coffee to stationery. A 20-minute VR spin-off, available at 100 locations nationwide, attracted repeat visitors willing to pay more than 100 yuan per session.

Wang Jun said the company remained convinced that strong content was the essential foundation – "and everything else follows." She described IP management as resting on two principles: rigorous protection of IP rights as a legal and commercial foundation, and openness to cross-industry collaboration that required studios to engage with sectors and audiences beyond their traditional orbit.

She cited "The Monkey King" – Shanghai Film Group's classic 1960s animation – as evidence of an IP's potential longevity: a 2012 re-release generated over 40 million yuan at the box office, followed by a 4K restoration in 2017.

The studio executives' shared focus on IP development drew an analytical response from Yin Hong, a film industry scholar at Tsinghua University. Yin said the structural pressures facing cinema required a fundamental rethinking of what makes a film worth watching in the first place.

Cheaper, faster and more convenient than a trip to the theaters, short-form video and streaming platforms had eroded some of film's traditional advantages and the medium needed to find new ones, he said.

What cinema needed in response was what Yin called "must-watch uniqueness" – an experience so distinctive that no home screen could replicate it. He noted that nearly every film achieving commercial success in recent years had done so through originality.

The industry, Yin said, is in transition from "a box office economy" to "an influence economy" – one in which a film's commercial value will be measured not primarily by what it earns at the multiplex, but by the reach of its cultural impact.

– Xinhua

## Air Macau axes flights in May-June as fuel costs surge



This photo taken from Big Taipa Hill earlier this month shows Air Macau jets parked on the local airport's apron.

– Photo: Tony Wong

Staff Reporter

Air Macau says that it has so far cancelled over 400 return flights scheduled for next month and June, due to soaring jet fuel costs triggered by the ongoing military conflict in the Middle East.

Air Macau told local Chinese-language media late last week that the cancelled flights included 155 international flights to destinations including Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Osaka, Seoul, Singapore, and Tokyo, and flights to various cities in the Chinese mainland.

According to the reports, Air Macau said that it decided to cancel the flights primarily due to the substantial rise in the global average jet fuel price, which had surged from US\$97 per barrel in late February to US\$205 per barrel last week, an increase of 110 percent.

Air Macau said that this has resulted in a sharp rise in flight operating costs, leaving the airline "with no choice but to adjust" some of its flights. The adjustment and cancellation of certain flights is a common practice within the international aviation industry in response to the pressure of soaring jet fuel costs, Air Macau underlined.

According to the reports, Air Macau said that it will continue to make "dynamic" adjustments to its flight schedules based on future trends in international aviation fuel prices. In response to rising jet fuel costs, Air Macau has prioritised measures such as increasing fuel surcharges and "optimising" ticket prices.

However, Air Macau said, the current increase in fuel surcharges is "no longer sufficient to fully cover the persistently high

operating costs" resulting from the soaring jet fuel costs. Furthermore, the airline said, continued increases in fuel surcharges would directly raise travel costs for passengers and then affect their willingness to fly.

With the aim of avoiding last-minute disruptions for passengers and protecting their interests to the greatest extent possible, Air Macau has chosen to adjust flights in advance, allowing passengers more time to plan and modify their itineraries, the airline underlined.

Air Macau said that concerning the flight cancellations scheduled for May and June, all affected passengers have been notified at least two weeks in advance.

For passengers whose flights have been cancelled due to rising fuel prices and commercial operational adjustments, Air Macau has signed mutual transfer agreements with several major airlines, offering a range of travel protection options.

The options, according to the reports, include 1) free transfer to another Air Macau flight to the same destination on the same day or within one day before or after; 2) free transfer to an Air Macau flight to a different destination within the same country or region; 3) free transfer to a same-day flight operated by a partner airline to the same destination, with Air Macau covering the corresponding ground transportation costs for the passengers; and 4) a full refund service with no cancellation fees.

The reports failed to contextualise the cancellations by providing them as a percentage of Air Macau's total scheduled flights. ■

## Xi says normal passage through Strait of Hormuz should be maintained

BEIJING – President Xi Jinping yesterday said normal passage through the Strait of Hormuz should be maintained.

Xi made the remarks during a phone conversation with Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud.

Xi pointed out that China attaches great importance to developing relations with Saudi Arabia and has always adhered to the principles of mutual respect, equality and mutual benefit.

Noting that this year marks the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the comprehensive strategic partnership between China and Saudi Arabia, Xi said China is willing to work with Saudi Arabia to seize this opportunity to deepen strategic mutual trust, strengthen practical cooperation, and enhance exchanges at all levels, so as to continuously expand the breadth and depth of bilateral relations and set as an example for advancing relations between China and Arab countries.

On the current situation in the Middle East and the Gulf region, Xi stressed that China calls for an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire and cessation of hostilities, supports all efforts conducive to restoring peace, and remains committed to resolving disputes through political and diplomatic means.

Xi said that the normal passage through the Strait of Hormuz serves the common interests

of regional countries and the international community, adding that China supports regional countries in building a common home marked by good-neighborliness, development, security and cooperation, mastering their own future and destiny, and promoting long-term peace and stability in the region.

Mohammed, for his part, said that Saudi-China relations are strategic and developing relations with China is vital to his country, noting that the current conflict in the Middle East undermines the security of Gulf nations and severely impacts global energy supply and economic operation.

Saudi Arabia, committed to resolving disputes and differences through dialogue, hopes to prevent the situation from escalating, he said, adding that China, as a responsible major country, has consistently upheld fairness and justice and supported good neighborliness, dialogue and cooperation among countries in the Middle East.

Saudi Arabia is willing to enhance communication and coordination with China to preserve the current ceasefire, prevent a resurgence of the conflict, ensure the safe and free navigation through the Strait of Hormuz, and jointly seek ways to achieve long-term peace and stability in the region, said Mohammed. (More on Middle East war on pages 9 & 10)

– Xinhua

# China shares emerging industries' IP experience to boost global governance

BEIJING – China's annual National Intellectual Property (IP) Publicity Week kicked off yesterday with a high-level forum focused on sharing its governance experience in protecting innovations in emerging industries like artificial intelligence (AI), as part of broader efforts to contribute to global governance.

As the world's largest filer of patent applications, China is taking a leading role in emerging fields. According to the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), China now accounts for over 60 percent of global AI patent applications, the highest share worldwide, and two-thirds of all robotic patent applications.

"Strengthening IP protection in emerging fields is both an urgent need to promote innovation and a strategic choice to enhance international competitiveness," Shen Changyu, commissioner of the China National Intellectual Property Administration, said in his opening speech at the forum.

China's IP governance actively adapts to the development needs of emerging sectors, advancing an IP protection system that evolves and responds to changing conditions. Shen listed some ongoing efforts, including guidelines addressing the inventiveness

standard for AI patents, data IP pilot programs in 17 provinces that have received over 100,000 applications, and a nationwide network of protection centers offering one-stop, rapid and efficient patent review services for innovators.

The forum is a major event during this year's IP Publicity Week, bringing together officials, enterprise executives and legal experts from home and abroad.

BrainCo, a brain-machine interface company and one of Hangzhou's cutting-edge "Six Little Dragons" tech firms, said its growth has benefited from IP protection. It has filed more than 550 patent applications since its founding eight years ago. As a leader in the emerging industry, BrainCo urged enterprises to take a long-term view, invest more in original R&D, and accelerate the commercialization of high-value patents to bring them from laboratories to the market.

"Innovation in emerging fields is a marathon without a finish line, and IP protection is our accelerator and guardian," said Yang Chengjun, senior vice president of BrainCo.

The view was echoed by Qian Kun, a global senior vice president of US tech giant Qualcomm, who believes innovation demands

long-term and high-risk investment. Strong external guarantees, especially a stable patent protection system, are essential, he said. Qian praised China for including "improving IP protection in emerging fields" in this year's government work report and expressed confidence that China's evolving IP system will support high-quality, innovation-driven growth.

Footwear giant Nike also spoke at the forum, as this year's World IP Day theme is "IP and Sports: Ready, Set, Innovate!" The company commended China's ongoing revisions to its Trademark Law, which aim to crack down on bad-faith filings and raise the cost of violations. It said a sound legal environment is key to its commitment to China, and it has benefited greatly from the country's IP protection system.

China's experience in IP governance aligns with its commitment to global AI governance, which follows the principles of extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits.

Ma Yide, dean of the School of IP at the University of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said China's large IP share in some emerging industries shows its shift from a follower to an important contender and even a leader.

"But leading in numbers does not mean leading in innovation level," Ma warned. "Foundational and original patents are still scarce, core algorithms still rely on others, and patent commercialization rates lag behind those of developed countries."

In his keynote speech, Ma called for more funding for large models, embodied AI and brain-computer interfaces, a quality-centered patent evaluation system, and stronger global patent filings. For future industries such as quantum information, bio-manufacturing and 6G, he added that IP protection should be more proactive, providing support from start to finish.

"China should pursue its IP development with a global vision," Ma said, noting that China can draw on international experience. He cited the U.S. strengths in basic research, patenting and tech transfer, the EU's role in data and AI rules, Japan's expertise in IP finance, and the Republic of Korea's strengths in talent cultivation.

"Through mutual learning and exchange, China can help build a fairer and more equitable global IP governance system and contribute Eastern wisdom to the progress of human civilization," Ma told Xinhua.

– Xinhua



A visitor examines agricultural robots at the 27<sup>th</sup> China (Shouguang) International Vegetable Science and Technology Expo in Shandong province. The event opened yesterday and runs through May 30. – Xinhua

## Digital reading boom draws more Chinese into books

### Analysis

NANCHANG – The rapid rise of digital reading is encouraging more Chinese people to develop reading habits, as access to books and overall reading rates continue to grow alongside a nationwide push to build a book-loving society.

Figures released yesterday at the fifth National Conference on Reading show that China's overall adult reading rate has reached 82.3 percent, while the number of books read per person, including both print and digital, rose to 8.39 in 2025.

The data, from a national reading survey and the 2025 China Digital Reading Report, reflects a growing reading population increasingly supported by digital formats.

The conference opened in Nanchang, Jiangxi Province, coinciding with the launch of China's first national reading week, which runs through Sunday. The initiative is part of wider efforts to foster a reading culture in China.

The survey shows that 80.8 percent of Chinese adults now engage with digital reading through formats such as e-books, online literature, audiobooks and video-based summaries.

The ability to listen to books during commutes or read serialized fiction on mobile devices has made reading more convenient and accessible, helping to expand participation, according to the findings.

By the end of 2025, China's digital reading user base had reached 689 million, up 2.95 percent from the previous year, while the total number of digital reading works exceeded 70 million.

The market size of digital reading has nearly doubled over the past five years, growing from 30.25 billion yuan to 59.48 billion yuan, pointing to strong growth in both supply and demand.

The market growth can be partly attributed to the evolution of online literature into a broader cultural industry. "The essence of reading is to allow stories to break through boundaries and enter everyday life,"

said Xie Lanfang, vice president of Yuewen Group, noting that content is increasingly extending into offline cultural consumption and interactive experiences.

Acknowledging the importance of reading in strengthening ethical and intellectual development and fostering innovation and creativity, China has been advancing efforts to build a book-loving society.

To enhance institutional support, a regulation on promoting nationwide reading, which took effect in February, sets out measures to improve reading facilities and services, as well as to reinforce relevant mechanisms.

The regulation designates the fourth week of April each year as national reading week, which is being observed for the first time this year. Over the coming week, reading events will be held across the country, including lectures and book fairs, salons and book donations, all aimed at promoting reading among the public.

"Reading service facilities have improved, and public awareness and satisfaction are relatively high," said Feng Shixin, president of the Chinese Academy of Press and Publication, adding that further efforts are needed to enhance accessibility and service quality.

Despite the surge in digital formats, traditional reading remains resilient. The survey shows that 45.9 percent of adults still prefer reading printed books, especially literary works, indicating continued demand for immersive and in-depth reading.

Wu Shulin, chairman of the Publishers Association of China, believes that in the digital era, deep reading remains the foundation for personal growth, career success and moral cultivation.

He called for stronger guidance on digital reading and efforts to foster a culture of deep reading, encouraging readers to shift from "fragmented browsing" to "in-depth reading."

– Xinhua

## China says preventing resurrection of militarism 'Japan's due obligation'

BEIJING – A Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson said yesterday preventing the resurrection of militarism is Japan's due obligation and the unwavering will of the international community, including China.

The spokesperson urged the Japanese side to draw lessons from history, abide by its international obligations, and remain committed to the path of peaceful development.

Spokesperson Guo Jiakun made the remarks at a regular press briefing in response to a question about recent protests by tens of thousands of Japanese people against the Japanese government's attempts to revise the country's pacifist constitution.

"We also noted that Japan's push for constitutional revision has been increasingly questioned and rejected in Japan itself as well as its Asian neighbors and the wider world," said Guo.

Japanese militarists have not only committed atrocities to the people in China and other countries in Asia, but also brought profound sufferings to the Japanese people, Guo added.

He noted Japan's constitutional revision concerns the postwar international order and where Japan is going, and it has been closely watched by the international community and its Asian neighbors.

However, so far, the Japanese side has failed to thoroughly reflect on its history of aggression, said Guo. Some forces in the country even attempted to gloss over and whitewash the crimes committed during the aggression, and push for accelerated remilitarization of Japan, which led to the rampant and dangerous spread of neo-militarism in the country and threatened regional peace and stability, Guo said, adding the international community needs to be on high alert against this.

– Xinhua

# Major provincial economies leveraging innovation prowess to fuel China's high-quality development

## Analysis

BEIJING – China's major provincial economies are steadily consolidating the foundation of national economic stability while unleashing momentum for progress, delivering high-quality development and expanding high-standard opening-up to fuel the country's overall growth.

These provinces are the locomotives of the world's second-largest economy. Ten provincial-level regions – Guangdong, Jiangsu, Shandong, Zhejiang, Sichuan, Henan, Hubei, Fujian, Shanghai and Hunan – contribute over 60 percent of China's GDP, even though they cover less than one-fifth of the country's land area.

In 2025, these economic powerhouses posted a combined GDP of over 85.5 trillion yuan. To put it in perspective: Hunan, which ranks 10<sup>th</sup> among them, has a GDP larger than that of the entire country of Sweden or Austria.

During the latest episode of China Economic Roundtable, an all-media talk show hosted by Xinhua News Agency, guests discussed how these provinces are spearheading the nation's 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan (2026-2030) by embracing new quality productive forces and opening up more widely to the world.

## ECONOMIC BALLAST AND NEW FORCES

Major provincial economies serve as both a ballast for stability and an engine for growth.

Liu Zhicheng, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Macroeconomic Research, said that on the supply side, they are the birthplace of new business forms and new quality productive forces, while on the demand side, their vast investment and consumption markets drive the national economy.

In the first two months of this year, the growth rate of industrial output above a designated size in most major provinces was higher than the national average, with Zhejiang achieving a rapid growth of 9.8 percent.

Meanwhile, Guangdong's computer, communication and electronics manufacturing surged 14.2 percent year on year, while Shandong and Jiangsu posted over 10 percent growth in equipment manufacturing.

"Major provincial economies should leverage their solid foundation to enhance the overall resilience of the national economy and support overall stability," Liu said. "In terms of technological innovation, they should act as 'locomotives' and take the lead in developing new quality productive forces. By integrating technological and industrial innovation, they can strengthen competitiveness and better deal with external uncertainties."

For example, Jigang Group, once a major steel producer in Jinan, the capital of Shandong Province, has rolled out its first satellite. The company plans to produce at least 20 more satellites this year.

In Shanghai's future brain-computer interface (BCI) industry cluster, more than 30

BCI companies have registered, covering key areas such as BCI chips and vision restoration. Guangdong has launched the country's first automated humanoid robot production line with an annual capacity of 10,000 units. Zhejiang is also building up its full aerospace industry chain.

Their innovation strength has gained global recognition. The Shenzhen-Hong Kong-Guangzhou innovation cluster topped the World Intellectual Property Organization's 2025 Global Innovation Index for the first time.

Liu Wenqiang, vice president of China Center for Information Industry Development, said major provinces should attach great importance to transforming and upgrading traditional industries, making them smarter, greener, and more integrated to unlock existing advantages. "At the same time, we need to accelerate the development of emerging and future industries, and build a number of future industry pilot zones to foster core momentum from new quality productive forces."

Guangdong, in its practice of shouldering major responsibilities, has leveraged its own resource advantages and development realities to deepen the construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, said Wu Zuyan, president of Guangdong Provincial Development and Reform Research Institute, noting that the area's economy surpassed 15 trillion yuan in 2025, boasting 10 industrial clusters each worth over a trillion yuan.

"We should encourage major provincial economies to increase the supply of factors such as application scenarios, data and computing power to provide solid support for building a modern industrial system," said Wu.

If major provincial economies successfully shoulder the heavy lifting, they can drive overall progress through a single sector, promote comprehensive development through breakthroughs in key areas, and continuously open up new prospects for Chinese modernization, Liu Zhicheng added.

## OPENING-UP PACESETTERS

China's economic powerhouses are also test beds for institutional opening-up. They have introduced innovative measures to optimize customs clearance procedures and support cross-border e-commerce. These steps have reduced burdens and boosted

vitality for foreign trade enterprises, helping China's foreign trade make a good start.

In the first two months of 2026, China's total goods trade surged 18.3 percent year on year to 7.73 trillion yuan. The 10 major provincial economies alone accounted for nearly 76 percent of this total.

At Zhanjiang Port in Guangdong, a "smart inspection" system uses near-infrared spectrometers and high-speed image recognition. This system has cut the average customs clearance time for iron ore by 15 hours.

Multinationals are also showing confidence through their investments. On March 26, BASF's 8.7-billion-euro Verbund site in Zhanjiang – the German chemical giant's largest single investment project wholly owned by a German enterprise in China – went fully operational. Guangdong province held regular high-level meetings to solve problems the project's construction, and Zhanjiang slashed approval time to 26 days.

A commerce ministry spokesperson noted that for many multinationals, investing in China has evolved from a "nice-to-have" option to a strategic "must-have."

China's rail links to Europe are also expanding. On March 31, the first Wuhan-Baku China-Europe freight train departed, using a rail-sea intermodal route that cuts delivery time by two-thirds compared to traditional shipping. Wuhan, in central China, now operates 63 stable cross-border routes covering 124 cities in 42 Eurasian countries.

Moreover, leveraging its strength as an international shipping center, Shanghai is deepening trade ties with Belt and Road partner countries through the coordinated operation of China-Europe freight trains and ocean shipping routes. Guangdong is strengthening cooperation with local enterprises in ASEAN and Central Asian markets to jointly explore optimal development paths.

Experts noted that major provincial economies must continue deepening reform and opening-up, accelerate the creation of an "institutional highland," and proactively align with high-standard international economic and trade rules.

As the 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan gets underway, China's economic heavyweights are not just carrying the nation – they are helping stabilize global supply chains and inject vitality into the world economy.

– Xinhua

## Taiwan business groups urge DPP to respond to mainland's exchange policies

TAIPEI – Business groups in Taiwan yesterday urged the island's authorities to respond to the newly unveiled policy measures by the mainland aimed at promoting cross-strait exchanges and cooperation.

The General Chamber of Commerce in Taiwan convened representatives from seven industry groups, including tourism, hospitality and food sectors, to express support for the measures and called on the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) authorities to adopt a more pragmatic approach and prioritize industrial development and people's livelihoods.

At a press briefing, Paul Hsu, chairman of the chamber, said that when organizing the event, the chamber faced pressure from the DPP authorities. "Industrial groups should not be stopped from voicing their concerns," he said.

The mainland unveiled a package of 10 policies and measures – spanning inter-party communication, infrastructure, travel, trade and culture – aimed at boosting exchanges and cooperation with Taiwan, on April 12, when Cheng Li-wun, chairwoman of the Chinese Kuomintang (KMT), wrapped up her mainland visit.

Restoring regular cross-strait direct passenger flights, the chamber said, will significantly facilitate personnel and business exchanges, reduce transit costs and help revive tourist flows, urging the island's authorities to seize the opportunity and facilitate the process.

Wu Ying-liang, chairman of the Travel Agent Association in Taiwan, said that the

number of cross-strait direct flights have yet returned to its normal level since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, adding that the island's tourism sector urgently needs visitors from the mainland.

The business groups also called on the authorities to seize the opportunity to resume individual travel by mainland tourists, which will not only boost the hospitality sector but also benefit transportation services and related industries, including souvenir and food businesses.

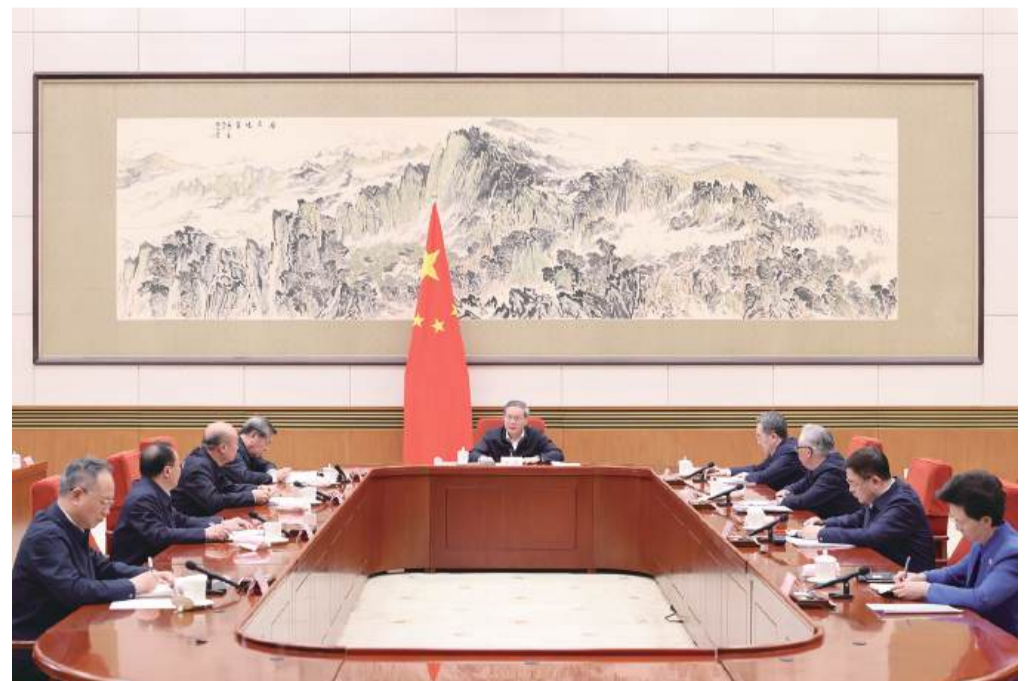
Recalling that mainland visitors had stayed for about a week on average when they were allowed to tour Taiwan, Hsiao Ching-tien, chief of Taiwan Tourist Hotel Association, noted that resuming individual travel would provide a significant boost for local tourism.

Chang Chuan-han, deputy chairperson of the Hotel Association in Taiwan, said that reopening to mainland visitors could raise the hotel occupancy rate by as much as 15 percentage points from the current 50 percent.

The General Chamber of Commerce in Taiwan also noted that while local agriculture and food businesses are seeking to diversify markets amid growing global uncertainty, expanding access to the mainland market would help sustain farmers' livelihoods and enhance the competitiveness of local agricultural brands.

It added that the DPP authorities should change their policies rather than placing themselves in opposition to the interests of business and people.

– Xinhua



Premier Li Qiang (center) presides over a State Council group study session on energy development yesterday. Li called for efforts to optimize China's energy structure and deepen reforms in energy systems to provide solid energy support for the country's green transition and high-quality development. – Xinhua

# Japan issues warning after 7.7-magnitude quake hits north

Hiroshi Hiyama

TOKYO – Japan issued a special advisory yesterday warning of an increased risk of earthquakes at magnitude 8.0 or stronger, after a powerful jolt rattled the country's north and prompted a tsunami warning.

The Japan Meteorological Agency's advisory came a few hours after a 7.7-magnitude earthquake struck in Pacific waters off northern Iwate prefecture at 4:53 p.m. [local time].

The jolt was so intense that it shook large buildings in the capital Tokyo, hundreds of kilometres from the epicentre.

The meteorological agency said that "the likelihood of a new, huge earthquake occurring is relatively higher than during normal times".

Municipalities in the affected region issued non-compulsory evacuation directives to more than 182,000 residents, according to the Fire and Disaster Management Agency.

Around 40 minutes after the quake, an 80-centimetre tsunami wave hit a port in Kuji in Iwate, according to the weather agency, which had initially estimated the magnitude at 7.4 before revising it upwards.

The agency said the later advisory about another possible earthquake only reflected an elevated risk, rather than providing any specific predictions.

"Although the probability is low, there is a possibility of another major earthquake occurring; therefore, please review your earthquake preparedness measures in these areas," it said in a statement.

By the evening, authorities slightly downgraded the tsunami warning but kept an advisory for possible waves up to one metre along the vast northeastern Pacific coast.

There were no immediate reports of serious injuries or significant damage, Chief Cabinet Secretary Minoru Kihara told a news conference.



This photo shows a general view of a crowded railway station as the Shinkansen services are suspended after an earthquake hit northern Japan, in Sendai city of Miyagi Prefecture yesterday.

– AFP

Footage from national broadcaster NHK showed no clearly visible damage around several ports in Iwate.

But officials have reiterated that aftershocks could strike the area over the coming week, particularly within the next two to three days, potentially "causing even stronger shaking".

## 'Megaquake' fears

The prime minister's office said it had set up a crisis management team, and the government was working to establish whether there were any casualties or serious property damage.

"For those of you who live in areas for which the warnings have been issued, please evacuate to higher, safer places," Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said.

Japan is one of the world's most seismically active countries, sitting on top of four major tectonic plates along the western edge of the Pacific "Ring of Fire".

The archipelago, home to around 125 million people, typically experiences around 1,500 jolts every year and accounts for about 18 percent of the world's earthquakes.

The vast majority are mild, although the damage they cause varies according to their location and the depth below the Earth's surface at which they strike.

Japan is haunted by the memory of a massive 9.0-magnitude undersea quake in 2011, which triggered a tsunami that killed or left missing around 18,500 people and caused a devastating meltdown at the Fukushima nuclear plant.

In 2024, the weather agency issued its first special advisory of a possible "megaquake" along the Nankai Trough.

This 800-kilometre undersea trench is where the Philippine Sea oceanic tectonic plate is "subducting" – or slowly slipping – underneath the continental plate that Japan sits atop.

The government has said a quake in the Nankai Trough and subsequent tsunami could kill as many as 298,000 people and cause up to US\$2 trillion in damage.

Another week-long "megaquake" advisory was issued in December 2025 after a magnitude-7.5 tremor struck off the northern coast, injuring more than 40 people but causing no major damage.

– AFP

# Cambodian king has 'successful' surgery after cancer diagnosis

PHNOM PENH – Cambodia's King Norodom Sihamoni underwent "successful" surgery in Beijing yesterday, former Cambodian leader Hun Sen said, after the royal announced he had prostate cancer.

Sihamoni, 72, shared his diagnosis earlier this month, saying he would stay in China for prolonged treatment.

The monarch had surgery at a Beijing hospital yesterday morning, the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh said in a statement.

Chinese doctors were requiring Sihamoni to stay in hospital for health monitoring, it added.

The king said earlier that doctors had prescribed hospitalisation of up to two months for treatment.

In a social media post, influential former leader Hun Sen, who visited Sihamoni in Beijing along with his eldest son, Prime

Minister Hun Manet, thanked the "excellent doctors who performed the successful and safe surgery for the king".

"The health of the king is the health of the whole nation," Hun Sen added, saying he would return to Cambodia if the king's health improved.

Hun Sen ruled Cambodia for nearly four decades and handed power to Hun Manet in 2023.

The king departed for Beijing for health checks over a month ago.

A lifelong bachelor who speaks Khmer, French, Czech and English, Sihamoni spent most of his adult life abroad pursuing a career in the arts before taking the throne in 2004.

He took over the role after his father, King Norodom Sihanouk, abdicated following his own cancer treatment in Beijing.

– AFP

# Indonesia pushes ahead with giant sea wall plan to protect Java's north coast

JAKARTA – Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto held a meeting with key officials here yesterday to push forward plans for a giant sea wall aimed at protecting the vulnerable northern coast of Java.

According to officials present at the meeting, the government is currently examining various critical aspects of the project, with a specific focus on construction feasibility and technical readiness.

While a definitive construction timeline has not been established,

officials indicated that the process could be accelerated to meet urgent needs.

Local media reported that universities and researchers will be involved, drawing on studies and research previously tested in Central Java to ensure efficiency.

The project is considered a strategic priority as it is designed to protect approximately 60 percent of industrial areas and more than 30 million residents living in the affected regions.

– Xinhua

# Scientists map over 1,000 hidden coral reefs in northern Australia

SYDNEY – Scientists have discovered and mapped over 1,000 previously uncharted coral reefs in northern Australia, vastly expanding known marine habitat in the region.

The reefs, stretching from Houtman Abrolhos in the state of Western Australia through to western Cape York in the state of Queensland, have until now been mostly invisible and overlooked in conservation and development planning, said a statement of the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) released yesterday.

The Marine and Coastal Hub project, led by AIMS in partnership with the University of Queensland, unveiled the reefs which are typically hidden in sediment-rich waters, it said, adding they were revealed not by sea expeditions but through advanced analysis of satellite imagery.

Combining around 200 satellite images of the area, the team created a composite image, which allowed them to "peek

deeper into the water column" and map the reefs, researchers said.

The work revealed that northern Australia had a similar quantity of reefs as the Great Barrier Reef, though many were much smaller, said AIMS e-Atlas Project Manager Eric Lawrey.

"It's a vast set of reefs that's been largely unknown about," Lawrey said, adding that the reefs, being a habitat for a wide range of marine life, were possibly known by locals.

Previously, most of the northern Australian coastline was unsurveyed. The best mapping could be found in the marine charts, which did not distinguish between coral reefs and rocky reefs as they were simply designed to warn vessels to stay clear.

The team mapped and classified over 3,600 coral and 2,900 rocky reefs, creating the first comprehensive view of northern Australia's reef boundaries, with final datasets available through public data portals, bolstering marine ecosystem protection.

– Xinhua

# Philippine forces kill at least 10 Maoist rebels in raids: army

MANILA – Government forces in the central Philippines have killed at least 10 Maoist guerrillas in several gun battles, the military said yesterday, in a deadly flare-up of the decades-old insurgency.

Troops were fighting "remnants" of the New People's Army (NPA) rebel group on Sunday near the municipality of Toboso on Negros island, the regional military command said.

The exact number of dead rebels was uncertain, with Philippine Army spokesman Colonel Louie Dema-ala in Manila telling AFP as many as 19 may have been killed.

The central Philippines military command said in a statement that "at least 10" NPA rebels were killed, including their local leader Roger Fabillar, in six firefights that

all occurred in Toboso on Sunday.

Set up 57 years ago, the NPA is fighting one of the world's longest-running communist insurgencies. The military estimates the rebel group has fewer than 2,000 armed members left.

More than 300 residents of Toboso – a village of 5,000-plus people – fled their homes on Sunday as gunfire rang out in the remote sugar cane-farming region, the municipal disaster management office said.

Yesterday, some left an elementary school where they had spent the night, and returned to their homes, Hospicio Carbajosa, the Toboso municipal disaster management officer, told AFP.

"We did not really see what happened, but residents told us a

firefight occurred near a commercial fishery farm," Carbajosa added.

Dema-ala, the military spokesman, told AFP that the area was "one of the more active remnants of the (guerrilla) front in the central Philippines".

The rebels "maintain a measure of local support and are able to extort the locals", he said.

"But because the community had got tired of them, it was the community that helped us identify their location and allowed us to conduct a military operation," Dema-ala added.

Carbajosa said there have been minor firefights in the past two years in nearby municipalities, but none of the scale of deaths reported in Toboso on Sunday.

– AFP

# Pakistan's military chief takes lead on US-Iran talks in diplomatic blitz

**Sameer Mandhro and Asad Hashim**

ISLAMABAD – Over a feverish few days of diplomacy, Pakistan's military and civilian politicians successfully divided the Middle East between them to push for a second round of US-Iran peace talks expected to take place in Islamabad this week.

The country's powerful military chief, Field Marshal Asim Munir, headed to Tehran on Wednesday for what would become a three-day trip, where Iranian leaders said he carried US proposals for a second round of peace talks.

Simultaneously, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and his foreign minister conducted a whirlwind diplomatic tour across regional allies Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey.

The twin trips illustrate the coordination at play in what is often described as a "hybrid regime" in Pakistan, and Munir's central role in the negotiating process.

"The synergy that is going on right now is giving results, and to take this momentum forward all this synergy will be needed," said Shehryar Khan, executive director of the Islamabad-based National Dialogue Forum.

Munir was one of two Pakistani mediators in the room during face-to-face talks between the United States and Iran in Islamabad on April 11.

"It's not political leadership that takes the decision in these kinds of situations, but the military leadership," said a Pakistani official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The official described Munir's visit to Iran as "important" in bringing both sides back to the negotiating table.

"The deal is almost done. He is the only person who can convince Iranians for a deal – that's because of the trust level."

## 'Who is the strong man?'

While a first round of peace talks between the United States and Iran did not yield an agreement, it did lead to the highest-level face-to-face negotiations between the two sides in decades, and communications channels remained open – through Pakistan.

Building on that momentum, Pakistan's leaders have been pushing for a second round of talks in Islamabad, with security being stepped up across the capital on Sunday in anticipation.



US Vice President JD Vance (centre) speaks with Army Chief and Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir (left) and Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar after arriving for the US-Iran peace talks in Islamabad, Pakistan on April 11. – AFP

Munir's rise on the global stage has coincided with a consolidation of military power in Pakistan, which has seen him given unprecedented legal immunity and an extended term.

The military as a whole has also taken a more prominent role in governance.

Critics and the political opposition say the moves, as well as sweeping constitutional reforms, have eroded democracy in the country.

However, the military has repeatedly denied meddling in the civilian domain – even though it ruled Pakistan for nearly half its existence through a series of coups since independence in 1947.

The National Dialogue Forum's Khan said that, while both civilians and military leaders were working closely together in the current system, it was Munir who had the authority to call the shots.

"Who is the person who can give the results? Who is the strong man? Who is controlling? Who is in the lead? That is obviously Mr Field Marshal," Khan said.

Munir has also built a close relationship with US President Donald Trump – who often refers to him as his "favourite field marshal" – since a brief but intense war with India last year.

Adam Weinstein, deputy director of the Middle East programme at Washington's Quincy Institute, said that relationship was crucial.

"Munir focused on Iran because it's the key stakeholder and he's seen as having the closest relationship with Trump," he said.

"... the prime minister focused on regional states with more traditional foreign policy bureaucracies, whose buy-in matters, but is less critical."

Muhammad Saeed, a retired Pakistani general, told AFP that Munir was in "direct communication" with the US leadership to negotiate through sticking points in the dialogue with Iran.

"His presence is bringing both the sides to a middle ground," he said. – AFP

## Bangladesh faces telecom shutdowns from Mideast fuel crisis

DHAKA – Bangladesh faces a widespread shutdown of mobile phones without rapid improvements in fuel shortages sparked by the Middle East war, operators said yesterday.

The South Asian nation of 170 million people imports 95 percent of its oil and gas, mostly from the Middle East, and shortages have hit hard, with queues at filling stations lasting for as long as 12 hours.

The Association of Mobile Telecom Operators of Bangladesh (AMTOB) said yesterday that continued telecom operations can no longer be sustained without the fuel needed to power operations including data centres.

"The situation has escalated beyond the operational control," AMTOB wrote in a letter to the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC).

"If these conditions persist, there is an imminent risk of large-scale telecom network shutdowns across significant parts of the country."

It said the impact had already begun.

"Mobile network operators (MNOs) are experiencing severe operational distress due to the prolonged unavailability of commercial power and the lack of assured fuel supply for backup systems," it said.

It said data centres consume approximately 500–600 litres of diesel per hour, amounting to nearly 4,000 litres per day per facility, which the local fuel stations are unable to provide.

"Multiple strategically vital telecom facilities are currently running on dangerously low fuel

reserves," the association said.

## 'Network blackout'

AMTOB secretary general Mohammad Zulfikar said shutdowns of data centres would create ripple effects across the wider network.

"A partial or complete network blackout could bring calls, internet, SMS (text messages) and all other services to a standstill or cause severe disruption," he told AFP.

"The internet may become painfully slow or go down entirely, as data centres are the command hubs where traffic is routed and controlled."

The government hiked fuel prices on Saturday, including raising diesel by 15 percent, from 100 to 115 taka (US\$0.93) a litre, and petrol up 16 percent, from 116 to 135 taka (US\$1.09) a litre.

The increase triggered demands from bus and water transport owners for fare adjustments.

Energy Minister Iqbal Hasan Mahmud told reporters on Sunday that Bangladesh had to raise the prices due to the global crisis.

"The entire world has adjusted prices – even the US," he said.

Depots were ordered to supply more fuel to filling stations at the revised prices – but it has so far made little impact.

Md Sagar, 30, a motorbike driver, said he has not seen any improvement. "I waited for three hours and moved only a few metres," he told AFP.

Another driver, Zakir Mia, said it took him 16 hours on Sunday to refill his car.

"People in the queue had to spend 10–12 hours at fuel stations," he said. – AFP

## N Korea uses cluster bombs in latest missile test: KCNA

**Kang Jin-kyu and Jihye Shin**

SEOUL – North Korea fired multiple short-range ballistic missiles that tested the power of its cluster munitions, its government news agency said yesterday, confirming the latest in a flurry of launches by the nuclear-armed state.

The Sunday launches, which were supervised by leader Kim Jong Un, aimed to "verify the characteristics and power of cluster bomb warhead and fragmentation mine warhead applied to the tactical ballistic missile", the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported.

They followed other tests in recent weeks of weaponry, including ballistic missiles, anti-warship cruise missiles and cluster munitions.

Neither Korea has signed the 2008 Oslo convention against cluster bombs.

South Korea condemned the launches and called on the North to cease "provocations".

KCNA said the manoeuvre tested the warhead of the Hwasongpho-11 Ra surface-to-surface tactical ballistic missile.

Five projectiles were fired towards a target area around an island about 136 kilometres from the launch site, it said.

They struck an area of 12.5 to 13 hectares with "very high density, fully displaying their combat might".

Kim "expressed great satisfaction over the test results" and noted that the development of cluster bomb warheads "can... boost the high-density striking capability to quell a specific target area as well as the high-precision striking capability", KCNA said.

Hong Min, a senior research fellow at the Korea Institute for National Unification, said the reported range would put Seoul and key US military installations within Pyongyang's reach.

"This system appears designed to fill the gap between multiple rocket launchers and short-range ballistic missiles," he said.

Yang Moo-jin, a professor at Seoul's University of North Korean Studies, noted that frontline corps commanders observed the test, in contrast to the weapons researchers who watched previous ones.

"This suggests the system is nearing operational deployment, with the capability to be launched directly from forward positions against South Korea and US bases," he said.

The United States stations about 28,000 troops in the South to help it defend against military threats from the North.

## 'Firm' defence posture

South Korea reported the test on Sunday, saying its military had "detected several short-range ballistic missiles" fired from the Sinpo area in eastern North Korea.

Seoul said it was maintaining a "firm combined defence posture" with the United States and would "respond overwhelmingly to any provocation".

"Pyongyang must immediately halt its successive missile provocations that are heightening tensions", and "actively engage in the South Korean government's efforts to establish peace", the defence ministry said.

But analysts said the tests

signalled that Pyongyang had rejected Seoul's attempts to repair strained ties.

Among them was an expression of regret from Seoul over civilian drone incursions into the North in January, a gesture that Pyongyang initially seemed to welcome before reverting to describing the South as its "most hostile" enemy state.

## 2 more destroyers

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.

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.

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

Citing satellite imagery from a US-based intelligence firm, a South Korean lawmaker said this month that the North 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

# Netanyahu vows 'harsh action' against soldier vandalising Jesus statue in Lebanon

JERUSALEM – Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed “harsh action” yesterday on a soldier caught on camera vandalising a statue of Jesus Christ in southern Lebanon.

The photo, which the military determined was authentic after it spread online, shows an Israeli soldier using a sledgehammer to strike the head of a statue of a crucified Jesus that had fallen off a cross.

The sculpture was located in the Christian village of Debl in south Lebanon, near the border with Israel, the local municipality told AFP, but officials could not say whether it had been damaged.

AFP geolocated the image to confirm it was taken in Debl, but was unable to access the village.

“I was stunned and saddened to learn that an IDF [Israel Defence Forces] soldier damaged a Catholic religious icon in southern Lebanon,” Netanyahu wrote on X.

“I condemn the act in the strongest terms. Military authorities are conducting a criminal probe of the matter and will take appropriately harsh disciplinary action against the offender,” he added.

Israel has conducted airstrikes across Lebanon and invaded the country’s south after Hezbollah entered the Middle East

war in support of its backer Iran on March 2.

The fighting killed nearly 2,300 people and displaced more than a million before a ceasefire came into effect last week. Israel has lost 15 soldiers in the war.

## ‘Profound indignation’

The military said it had determined after an investigation that the image circulating on social media was genuine and showed an Israeli soldier operating in southern Lebanon.

Checks carried out by AFP using detection tools suggested the image was likely genuine, though there were other manipulated photos circulating on social media.

The Israeli military said in a post on its official X account that it viewed the incident with “great severity”, adding that the “soldier’s conduct is wholly inconsistent with the values expected of its troops”.

The military said “appropriate measures will be taken against those involved” but did not go into further detail.

It said it is working with the community to “restore the statue to its place”.

The Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land in a statement published

by the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem expressed “its profound indignation and unreserved condemnation”.

“This act constitutes a grave affront to the Christian faith and adds to other reported incidents of desecration of Christian symbols by IDF soldiers in southern Lebanon,” the statement said.

“The Assembly calls for immediate and decisive disciplinary action, a credible process of accountability, and clear assurances that such conduct will neither be tolerated nor repeated.”

“For this reason, the Assembly renews, with urgency, its call to bring to an end the war that has tormented this region for far too long.”

Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar condemned the conduct as “shameful and disgraceful”.

“I am confident that necessary severe measures will be taken against whoever committed this ugly act,” he wrote on X.

“We apologise for this incident and to every Christian whose feelings were hurt.”

Israeli troops remain in southern Lebanon despite the ceasefire.

Netanyahu last month was drawn into a row around religion and forced to defend himself after he said that Jesus had “no advantage” over Mongolian conqueror Genghis Khan. – AFP

# Whale stranded on German coast swims off, gets stuck again

BERLIN – Efforts to rescue a humpback whale stranded for weeks on Germany’s Baltic Sea coast were complicated yesterday when the mammal unexpectedly swam away but then appeared to have got stuck again.

The 13.5-metre whale and its struggle for survival have captured the hearts of the German public, with some of the press calling him “Timmy”.

Rescuers had cleared sand away from the spot where the whale had been stuck for around three weeks off the island of Poel, near Wismar, and sent a tugboat to be used in the rescue effort.

The plan was to lift the whale from the seabed using inflatable cushions and transport it with pontoons back to the North Sea or possibly as far as the Atlantic Ocean.

However, the animal swam free on its own yesterday, before coming to a halt on a different sandbank nearby, said Till Backhaus, environment minister for the state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania.

Rescuers see the escape attempt as a sign that the whale is still relatively healthy and plan to try again, the *Bild* daily reported.

Backhaus, speaking at the scene, insisted the whale this time had not become fully stranded and was instead “resting”.

The creature was first spotted stuck on a sandbank on March 23 near the city of Lübeck before freeing itself and then becoming stuck again several times.

On April 1, regional officials said they were convinced that the badly injured and distressed animal was going to die and could no longer be saved.

But local authorities last week approved a last-ditch rescue attempt proposed by two entrepreneurs, one of whom founded a major electronics retail chain. – AFP

# Lebanese president says aiming to end hostilities with Israel talks

BEIRUT – Lebanese President Joseph Aoun said yesterday that planned talks with Israel aim to end hostilities and the occupation in the south, even as Hezbollah and its supporters rejected the negotiations.

Hezbollah lawmaker Hassan Fadlallah told AFP yesterday it was in Aoun’s and Lebanon’s “interest” to withdraw from the talks, however adding that his group also wanted the ceasefire to last.

A 10-day ceasefire pausing more than six weeks of war between Hezbollah and Israel started on Friday after being announced by US President Donald Trump.

“It is in the interest of Lebanon, the president of the republic and the government to move away from the path of direct negotiation and return to a national understanding about the best option for Lebanon,” Fadlallah told AFP.

“Perhaps through indirect negotiations, even via the United States of America, we can achieve” Lebanon’s goals, Fadlallah stated.

Aoun said yesterday the goal of negotiations was to “stop hostilities, end the Israeli occupation of southern regions and deploy the [Lebanese] army all the way to the internationally recognised southern borders”.

Fadlallah said regional powers including Iran, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have worked to build a US-Iran diplomatic track, which creates “a regional umbrella that can provide a kind of guarantee for Lebanon.”

“Going into direct bilateral negotiations, alone, amid deep Lebanese divisions and internal disagreements, constitutes a threat to internal consensus.”

He noted that there was no direct communication with the president, while Hezbollah’s ministers remain in Lebanon’s cabinet.



Lebanese Civil Defence personnel remove a body from a destroyed car next to the bomb-damaged Qasmiyeh bridge near the southern city of Tyre yesterday.

– AFP

Aoun’s remarks yesterday came after an address to the nation on Friday, in which he said: “We negotiate for ourselves... we are no longer a pawn in anyone’s game, nor an arena for anyone’s wars, and we never will be again.”

The truce in Lebanon was also one of Iran’s conditions for resuming talks with Washington to extend their separate ceasefire and work out the terms of a lasting peace.

Lebanon is officially at war with Israel and has no diplomatic relations with its southern neighbour.

## Aoun faces backlash

On the road to Beirut’s international airport, in the southern suburbs where Hezbollah holds sway, AFP images showed fresh graffiti attacking Aoun and Prime Minister Nawaf Salam yesterday, following their endorsement of negotiations.

“Joseph is a traitor, Nawaf is a turncoat,” said one spray-painted sign.

“Dealing with Israel is forbidden... no to normalisation,” another read.

Senior Hezbollah official Mahmud Qamati blasted Aoun on Saturday, saying “defeated,

you go to the Israelis and Americans, let’s see what you will get out of it”.

Hezbollah supporters also heaped scorn on Aoun on social media.

“You’re going to hand over the south after two days of negotiations?” one user posted on X, adding “we won’t let you” sign an agreement.

“After all our sacrifices this guy wants to speak for us?” another user posted on X, with their profile picture showing a picture of Aoun and Salam with the words “they do not represent me”.

Israeli attacks killed nearly 2,300 people and forced over a million to flee their homes, Lebanese authorities said, since Hezbollah pulled the country into the Middle East war last month.

“Any outcome of direct negotiations cannot be imposed on the people who made these sacrifices,” Fadlallah told AFP.

## ‘I am full of hope’

Aoun yesterday named former Lebanese ambassador to Washington Simon Karam to head the negotiations with Israel.

In December, Karam became the first Lebanese civilian representative to directly speak with Israeli representatives in decades, as part of a ceasefire monitoring mechanism set up at the end of a previous round of fighting between Israel and Hezbollah in 2023 and 2024.

“Lebanon is facing two options: either the continuation of the war, with all its humanitarian, social, economic, and sovereign repercussions, or negotiations to put an end to this war and achieve lasting stability,” Aoun said.

“I have chosen negotiations, and I am full of hope that we will be able to save Lebanon,” he said. – AFP

## Starmer admits should never have named Mandelson as US envoy

Peter Hutchison and Joe Jackson

LONDON – Embattled Prime Minister Keir Starmer said yesterday he had been wrong to appoint Labour politician Peter Mandelson as UK envoy to Washington, seeking to quell anger over a scandal surrounding Jeffrey Epstein's long-time associate.

Starmer, already widely unpopular with the public and many Labour MPs, is struggling to manage a controversy that has threatened to bring down his leadership.

Addressing parliament about the deepening political row, Starmer said: "At the heart of this, there is also a judgment I made that was wrong. I should not have appointed Peter Mandelson".

He faced fresh calls to quit last week after it was revealed that Mandelson – whose friendship with the late convicted US sex offender was long known – had become Britain's envoy to Washington last year despite failing security checks.

Starmer has insisted that he and other ministers were not told until last week that Mandelson had failed the independent vetting process.

"It beggars belief that throughout the whole timeline of events, officials in the Foreign Office saw fit to withhold this information from the most senior ministers in our system, in government," he told MPs.

"If I had known before he took up his post that [the] recommendation was that developed vetting clearance should be denied, I would not have gone ahead with the appointment."

### 'Unconventional'

Last Thursday, Starmer sacked the Foreign Office's top civil servant, Olly Robbins, telling MPs that he had set in motion a review of the security vetting process.

But ex-civil servants have accused Starmer of scapegoating Robbins, who will give his own account to a parliamentary watchdog committee today.

Opposition leaders have called for the centre-left Labour leader to step down, with accusations ranging from incompetence to wilful misleading of parliamentarians and the public.

Starmer told parliament in February that "full due process" was followed when Mandelson was vetted and cleared for the key role.

His Downing Street office has insisted that remains true because government rules meant the Foreign

Office had the power to overrule vetting concerns, without the knowledge of Starmer and his top team.

On Friday, Downing Street took the unusual step of releasing a memo that insisted he had only found out about the vetting failure last Tuesday.

Senior ministers have so far rallied around Starmer.

"A judgement was made that the Trump administration was an unconventional administration and an unconventional ambassador could do a job for the United Kingdom," Scotland Secretary Douglas Alexander said yesterday.

"That judgement was wrong and the prime minister accepts that."

### 'He has to go'

Other ministers have argued that Starmer should remain in power amid the global tumult sparked by the Middle East war and other issues, including forging closer relations with the European Union.

But polls suggest Starmer is one of Britain's most unpopular prime ministers ever.

If Starmer had known about the failed vetting "then he has to go, he has to resign", retired dentist Andrews Connell, 59, told AFP.

"If he knew that's really bad. If he didn't know, he should have known."

Pensioner Lyndia Shaw, 73, agreed saying Starmer is "absolutely hopeless, hopeless, and I feel that yes Mandelson should face the full force of the law without doubt".

But retiree Duncan Moss, 67, said he would be "very worried if Starmer was to leave and to not run the country. I think he's doing a very good job. I think he's a very mature, experienced leader".

Starmer sacked Mandelson in September 2025, seven months after he took up the post, after new details emerged about the depth of the ex-envoy's ties to Epstein, who died in a US prison in 2019 while facing sex-trafficking charges.

UK police are investigating allegations of misconduct in office by Mandelson, 72, when he was a Labour minister more than 15 years ago. He was arrested and released in February.

Mandelson has not been charged and denies criminal wrongdoing.

Starmer and his Labour party are also bracing for a chastening set of local elections next month, including in the devolved Scottish and Welsh parliaments. – AFP

## 8 children killed in US domestic violence shooting

Shreveport Gianrigo Marletta

SHREVEPORT – A man shot dead eight children – seven of them his own – on Sunday in the southern US state of Louisiana in an incident of domestic violence that spanned three locations, police said.

The early morning massacre at a grey house in the city of Shreveport was the deadliest mass shooting in the United States in more than two years, according to data from the Gun Violence Archive.

Two women were shot and seriously injured, including the mother of some of the slain children.

Three boys and five girls aged between three and 11 were shot and killed, the Caddo Parish Coroner's Office said. Seven of the children were siblings, and one was a cousin.

A ninth child escaped with non-life-threatening injuries, officials said.

Police identified the gunman as Shamar Elkins, 31, who was shot dead following a police chase after carjacking a vehicle.

"At the end of that pursuit, the suspect exited the vehicle with a firearm, and ultimately our officers were forced to neutralise the suspect," police Corporal Chris Bordelon told reporters.

An AFP videographer at the scene saw five bullet holes in the white door of the small, two-story house. Well-wishers laid bouquets of flowers nearby.

Freddie Montgomery, 72, who lives across the street, said he saw police remove bodies from the house on Sunday morning.

"At this time [Sunday] afternoon, all of those kids were in the front yard playing. And he [Elkins] was sitting on the porch," Montgomery told AFP.

### Drowning in 'dark thoughts'

Bordelon said seven of the eight children were the shooter's "own".

He said police "are still actively investigating, trying to determine the why" and were searching for evidence in a crime scene that spanned three locations.

"We do believe him to be the only



Mourners attend a candlelight vigil on Sunday in Shreveport, Louisiana, where eight children were killed and two women were wounded during a domestic violence shooting earlier that day, according to local authorities. – AFP

individual that fired gunshots at these locations," Bordelon said, calling the incident a "domestic disturbance."

Elkins is believed to have first shot his wife, and then gone to a second residence where the children were killed.

Police said that Elkins was arrested in 2019 in a firearms case in which he pleaded guilty, but they were not aware of other issues of domestic violence in his past.

US media reported that he served in the Louisiana Army National Guard for seven years, although he was never deployed, before leaving in 2020.

Elkins had marital problems with his wife and was struggling with his mental health, *The New York Times* reported, citing family members.

He told his stepfather Marcus Jackson that his wife wanted a divorce and that he was drowning in "dark thoughts," according to the report.

"This is a terrible event to occur. It's especially important and distressing that the victims are all children," city Mayor Tom Arceneaux told reporters.

"It lets you know that evil still exists in the world and that we need to be fighting everything we can to overcome that evil with good, to shed light in the darkness."

### 'Heartbroken'

The coroner's office said the children who were killed were

identified by their mothers as: Jayla Elkins, 3; Shayla Elkins, 5; Kayla Pugh, 6; Layla Pugh, 7; Markaydon Pugh, 10; Sariah Snow, 11; Khedarrion Snow, 6; and Braylon Snow, 5.

ABC affiliate KTBS reported that the two women were shot in the head.

Police told AFP that one of the women who had been shot in the lower part of the face had raised the alarm with a neighbour who had made the 911 emergency call to alert authorities between 5 a.m. and 5:30 a.m. (local time).

One of Louisiana's two US senators, Republican Bill Cassidy, called the incident an episode of "horrific violence."

Louisiana Governor Jeff Landry said he was "heartbroken."

Mike Johnson, the speaker of the US House of Representatives who was born in Shreveport and is a congressman for the region, denounced the incident on X as a "senseless tragedy."

"It's a terrible morning in Shreveport and we all mourn with the victims," Arceneaux, the Shreveport mayor, said at a news conference.

The United States, where firearms are readily available, is a frequent scene of gun violence, with thousands of people killed every year. It has the highest rate of gun-related deaths among all developed nations. – AFP

## FBI director files US\$250 million defamation suit against US magazine

WASHINGTON, DC – FBI Director Kash Patel filed a defamation lawsuit yesterday against a US magazine that reported he frequently drinks to excess and is in danger of losing his job.

Patel is seeking US\$250 million in damages from *The Atlantic* and the author of the article, Sarah Fitzpatrick, for what the suit described as a "sweeping, malicious, and defamatory hit piece."

"Defendants are of course free to criticise the leadership of the FBI," the complaint filed in a federal district court in Washington says.

"But they crossed the legal line by publishing an article replete with false and obviously fabricated allegations designed to destroy

Director Patel's reputation and drive him from office," it says.

According to *The Atlantic*, Patel's job as head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the top law enforcement agency, is in jeopardy in part because of what it said were "bouts of excessive drinking" and "unexplained absences."

In his defamation complaint, Patel took issue with the magazine's use of anonymous sources for the story.

"Fitzpatrick could not get a single person to go on the record in defence of these outrageous allegations, instead relying entirely on anonymous sources she knew to be both highly partisan with an axe to grind," the suit says.

"Defendants published the

Article with actual malice, despite being expressly warned, hours before publication, that the central allegations were categorically false."

*The Atlantic* issued a statement yesterday defending the story.

"We stand by our reporting on Kash Patel, and we will vigorously defend *The Atlantic* and our journalists against this meritless lawsuit," the magazine said.

Since being named FBI director, Patel has been accused of carrying out a purge of agents perceived as being disloyal to President Donald Trump. Among those dismissed have been agents who worked on criminal cases brought against Trump after he left office in 2021. – AFP



In this video grab taken from footage broadcast by the UK Parliamentary Recording Unit (PRU) via the Parliament TV website yesterday, Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer makes a statement on the controversial vetting procedure undertaken for the former UK ambassador to the United States, Peter Mandelson. – AFP

# Pope Leo blasts ‘exploitation’ on visit to resource-rich Angola

Alberto Pizzoli and Clement Melki

SAURIMO – Pope Leo XIV condemned exploitation and corruption by the rich and powerful yesterday during a visit to Angola’s diamond-rich northeast, returning to a theme of his 11-day tour of Africa.

The American pope, on the eighth day of his trip to four African nations, visited Saurimo, some 800 kilometres east of the capital, Luanda.

Under tropical heat and heavy security, Leo drove through the city of around 200,000 people along a route lined by hundreds of singing and cheering locals dressed in colourful outfits and waving white scarves.

Saurimo is the capital of the historically marginalised Lunda Sul province and close to Angola’s largest diamond mine, Catoca, which extracts around 75 percent of the country’s diamonds.

The Portuguese-speaking country is one of Africa’s top producers of crude oil and diamonds, yet around a third of its people live below the World Bank poverty line.

“We can see today how the hope of many people is frustrated by violence, exploited by the powerful and defrauded by the rich,” the pope said in Portuguese at a giant open-air Mass.

“Consequently, when injustice corrupts hearts, the bread of all becomes the possession of a few.”



Pope Leo XIV waves to the crowd from the Popemobile as he arrives for Mass in Saurimo, northeastern Angola, on the eighth day of an 11-day apostolic journey to Africa, yesterday. – AFP

Authorities estimated that about 40,000 people attended the Mass with another 20,000 taking part from surrounding areas.

The pope also criticised tyranny and exploitation in the first two legs of his marathon Africa journey, in Algeria and Cameroon, showing a tougher tone from a previously more reserved style.

## Meeting the elderly

Soon after landing in Saurimo earlier yesterday, the pope was welcomed at a home for around 60 elderly people who have either been abandoned by their families or are victims of violence.

“Your presence in this home is a blessing from God,” 72-year-old António Joaquim told him.

Despite its mineral wealth, Lunda Sul province bordering the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) suffers extreme poverty, with mining also blamed for environmental damage and displacing communities.

On the first day of his Angola stopover on Saturday, the pope spoke out against the harm caused by the rampant exploitation of the continent’s natural resources.

“How much suffering, how many deaths, how many social and environmental disasters are caused by this logic of exploitation,” he said in an address to government officials including President João Lourenço.

After John Paul II in 1992 and Benedict XVI in 2009, Leo is the third pope to visit this country, which was badly battered in a 27-year civil war that erupted after independence from Portugal in 1975, following an over decade-long war of liberation against Portugal.

At a Mass on Sunday attended by 100,000 people, the 70-year-old pontiff called for Angola to overcome divisions of the past and create a future where “the scourge of corruption will be healed by a new culture of justice and sharing”.

Some 44 percent of the population, about 15 million Angolans, identify as Catholic, according to a 2024 census in this southern African country.

Today, the pope is due to travel to Equatorial Guinea to wrap up an 18,000-km journey across Africa over 11 days. – AFP

## Portugal approves autonomous vehicle testing on public roads

LISBON – The Portuguese government has approved a decree-law authorizing tests of autonomous vehicles on public roads, making it one of a limited number of European countries to establish a legal framework for such trials.

The approval aims to attract foreign investment and promote innovation in the autonomous mobility sector, the government said in a statement on Thursday.

The legislation sets out licensing requirements for drivers, system operators, and vehicles, with strict

safety standards as a prerequisite for autonomous vehicles operating on public roads.

Earlier this month, Tesla announced it had received approval to deploy its supervised autonomous driving system in the Netherlands, marking the first authorization of the technology in Europe.

Other major players – including US firm Waymo, ride-hailing company Lyft, and Chinese tech firm Baidu – are also advancing autonomous vehicle plans in Europe.

– Xinhua

## Spain calls Machado decision to skip PM meeting a ‘mistake’

MADRID – Spain’s leftist government said yesterday it was a “mistake” for Venezuelan opposition leader María Corina Machado to meet right-wing parties in Madrid while declining talks with Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez.

The 2025 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, who addressed supporters at a large rally in Madrid on Saturday, has criticised Spain’s government for not more forcefully condemning human rights abuses in Venezuela.

She met with the leader of Spain’s main opposition conservative People’s Party (PP), Alberto Núñez Feijóo, as well as the head of the far-right Vox party, Santiago Abascal, during her time in the Spanish capital.

However, she told Spanish media she declined a meeting with Sánchez because it would not serve the “higher objective” of Venezuela’s freedom.

Spanish Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares said Machado had acted as an “ideological leader” by engaging with only part of Spain’s political spectrum.

“I sincerely believe that is a mistake. And when it is the far-right faction, it is an even greater mistake,” Albares said during an interview with Spanish public radio.

Albares rejected Machado’s criticisms as “unfair,” noting that Spain has granted refuge to several Venezuelan opposition figures such as Leopoldo López and has offered Machado refuge in Caracas in the past.

Machado, who was in hiding before leaving Venezuela in December to collect her Nobel Prize in Oslo, was barred from running for president in the 2024 election, which resulted in longtime leader Nicolás Maduro claiming re-election in a vote the opposition says was rigged.

Since leaving Venezuela, Machado has held talks with world leaders, including US President Donald Trump and French President Emmanuel Macron, as she lobbies for international support for the Venezuelan opposition.

– AFP

## ‘No reason’ for US intervention in Cuba: Merz



Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (left) and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz shake hands during a joint press conference after German-Brazilian governmental consultations in Hanover, Lower Saxony, northern Germany, yesterday. The consultations took place on the sidelines of the Hannover Messe industrial trade fair. Brazil is the 2026 partner country of the fair, that will end on Friday. – AFP

HANNOVER – German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said yesterday there was no evident justification for the United States to attack Cuba, following months of mounting pressure from President Donald Trump on the communist-ruled island.

“Despite all the domestic political problems that this country has with its communist regime, there is no discernible threat emanating from Cuba towards other countries,” Merz said.

Cuba has been bracing for a possible attack following repeated warnings from Trump that Cuba is “next” after he toppled Venezuela’s leader Nicolás Maduro and went to war against Iran.

Speaking at a news conference beside Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Merz said the US should settle its differences with Cuba “peacefully and through diplomatic means and not needlessly start a new conflict in the world which will only cause more problems”.

“The ability to defend oneself does not mean the right to intervene militarily in other states when their political systems do not match what others might have in mind,” he said.

Trump has imposed an oil blockade of Cuba, aggravating the impoverished island’s worst economic and energy crisis in decades.

Lula called the United States’ more longstanding blockade of Cuba a “global disgrace”, imposed for “ideological” reasons, and expressed his firm opposition to any US invasion of Cuba.

“I am against the lack of respect for the territorial integrity of nations, I am against any country in the world meddling and exercising political interference,” Lula said.

“A lot of dialogue, a lot of diplomacy, a lot of democracy – that is what we want in order to resolve and solve the world’s problems, and not weapons.”

– AFP

## Cafu says 2026 World Cup is perfect time for Brazil to win again



MADRID – Brazil's two-time World Cup winner Cafu said yesterday he believes this year's tournament is the perfect time for the five-time champions to take back the crown for the first time for 24 years.

Cafu was captain when Brazil won their fifth World Cup, beating Germany 2-0 in the 2002 final in Yokohama.

He was also part of the side that beat Italy on penalties to win in 1994 in Pasadena.

"Twenty-four years after the last title win, I think it's the perfect moment for Brazil," Cafu told reporters in Madrid, where he is attending the Laureus Awards.

"We've also brought in a serial winner of a coach, Carlo Ancelotti, who will add to the greatness of the Brazilian national team."

Cafu, who was a right-back, said Brazil already had strength in midfield and attack, so Ancelotti had focused on strengthening the defence for this year's tournament to be held in the US, Mexico and Canada.

"Because if Brazil doesn't concede goals in a World Cup, they're sure to score a goal per game," Cafu said.

He said he hoped Real Madrid forward Vinicius Junior, a player often embroiled in controversy, would have a strong tournament, saying: "The World Cup is the best way to overcome any kind of controversy."

"In those eight matches (if they reach the final), Vinicius Junior has the potential to show the whole world his worth and what he can do in terms of football."

Vinicius produced an assist in the 3-1 victory over Croatia in Orlando on April 1, which helped dispel doubts after the defeat against France in another friendly.

Endrick, 19, also shone in the Croatia win.

"I think it's a good time for him," said Cafu, who believes Real Madrid's decision to loan the forward to French club Lyon last year had been a positive move for the teenager.

"It did him a lot of good. It helped him grow, play, make his mark, and become a key player. It's obvious that at Real Madrid, with so many stars, it's difficult for a young player to become a key player."

"He's a young player who can contribute a lot to Brazil, and I'm sure Ancelotti is looking at him favourably," added Cafu.

Bookmakers have placed Brazil among the top five favourites, with reigning European champions Spain currently leading the way. – AFP



Former Brazilian football player Cafu poses on the Red Carpet ahead of the 27th Laureus World Sports Awards gala in Madrid, Spain yesterday. – AFP

## Rose to take charge at Bournemouth after Iraola exit



LONDON – Bournemouth announced yesterday that German manager Marco Rose will take charge of the Premier League club next season, succeeding the departing Andoni Iraola.

The highly-rated Iraola revealed last week he will leave the club after three years on England's south coast at the end of the current campaign.

Former Borussia Dortmund and RB Leipzig coach Rose has signed a three-year deal.

"AFC Bournemouth is delighted to confirm the appointment of Marco Rose as the club's new head coach on a three-year contract, which will begin following the conclusion of the 2025/26 season," the club said in a statement.

The Cherries are eighth in the Premier League, with five games to go this season, chasing European qualification for the first time in their history.

Iraola has been linked with a number of Premier League jobs and a return to Athletic Bilbao, where he spent the vast majority of his playing career.

Rose has been out of the game since being sacked by Leipzig in March 2025.

But the 49-year-old deploys a similar high-pressing style to the one Iraola has successfully implemented and has a track record of improving young players.

Rose has worked with the likes of



Leipzig's German head coach Marco Rose reacts after the German first division Bundesliga football match against Borussia Dortmund in Leipzig, eastern Germany on March 15, 2025. – AFP

Erling Haaland, Jude Bellingham and Dominik Szoboszlai during his career in Germany and Austria and has vast experience of European football.

After winning two Austrian league titles with Red Bull Salzburg, Rose led Borussia Mönchengladbach into the Champions League to earn his big move to Dortmund in 2021.

However, he lasted just one season with the German giants after finishing second in the Bundesliga to Bayern Munich.

Rose then had a two-and-a-half year

spell at Leipzig, where he won the German Cup in 2023.

"The club's immediate focus remains firmly on finishing the current campaign as strongly as possible, with the players and staff continuing to show full commitment to achieving positive results and building on the current 13-game unbeaten run," added the Bournemouth statement.

"Everyone at AFC Bournemouth looks forward to welcoming Marco to Vitality Stadium as he begins his role as head coach in the summer." – AFP

## Real Madrid coach Arbeloa launches stout defence of Mbappe



MADRID – Real Madrid coach Alvaro Arbeloa mounted a strong defence of French superstar Kylian Mbappe, who was criticised for what some perceived as ignoring his defensive responsibilities in last week's Champions League defeat by Bayern Munich.

Arbeloa, who himself is underfire with Real all but certain to finish without a trophy this term, said Mbappe had nothing to reproach himself about and that aside from scoring in both legs of the quarter-final he had "given his all in defence".

Real lost 4-3 in a thrilling second-leg tussle with Bayern Munich - who progressed 6-4 on aggregate - with the Spanish side reduced to 10 men after Eduardo Camavinga was sent off in the 86th minute.

Bayern scored twice after the Frenchman's dismissal, which sparked the criticism of Mbappe.

Arbeloa, though, was having none of this at his eve-of-match press conference yesterday.

"I have nothing to reproach Kylian about," said Arbeloa, whose side host Alaves today.

"He was at the top of his game, he scored in both legs and was a constant threat to their defence.

"He gave his all in defence, he worked really hard.

"I was thoroughly satisfied with his performance in that match," added the 43-year-old.

Mbappe, who has scored 40 goals in all competitions in his second season in Spain,

will have to wait another year to realise "his dream" of winning the Champions League.

It was the reason why he joined Madrid from French giants Paris Saint-Germain, who promptly rubbed salt into his wounds by winning European club football's most prized trophy last term.

Whether Arbeloa, who replaced Xabi Alonso earlier this season, is the man still in charge next term is in doubt - arch-rivals Barcelona lead Real by nine points in the race for the La Liga crown with seven matches remaining.

However, he refused to comment on his future, aside from saying it was not in his hands, but remarked that there was no need for a "huge revolution" at Real in order to turn things round next campaign. – AFP

## Multiple injured in clash at Paraguay football match

### Football

ASUNCION – Paraguayan officials suspended a football match between Olimpia and Cerro Porteno on Sunday after several people were injured when Cerro Porteno fans clashed with police at a stadium in the capital.

Witnesses said the violence was sparked by the detonation of high-powered firecrackers that were smuggled into the section of the Defensores del Chaco Stadium allocated to Cerro Porteno supporters.

One person told a local newspaper that some fans disarmed a police officer of his riot shield and "paraded it like a trophy" in front of the crowd in Asuncion.

Police responded by firing rubber bullets and tear gas into the stands, forcing

hundreds of spectators to flee onto the pitch, according to television footage of the incident, which showed smoke engulfing portions of the stands.

The match - played before a crowd of about 40,000 - was called off after 29 minutes of play, and about 100 people were detained.

"Police officers acted immediately to ensure the safety of those in attendance," local police said in a statement.

Security forces said at least six officers were injured - with one in serious condition - and transported to a hospital. It was not immediately clear whether any fans had been injured.

David Torales, a spokesperson for the hospital, said the injured officers sustained head injuries, lacerations, including

possible stab wounds, and other injuries.

Police said they were working to "identify those who instigated the conflict so that they may be sanctioned and barred from attending future sporting events."

The Paraguayan Football Association (APF) holds that a team must forfeit a match if its supporters force the game to be suspended.

Olimpia President Rodrigo Noguez said his club will seek the three points for the match from the APF disciplinary tribunal.

Cerro Porteno President Blas Reguera, meanwhile, said Olimpia was responsible for stadium security, citing their status as the match's organising club.

Olimpia currently leads Paraguay's top football division, while Cerro Porteno sits in second place. – AFP

# Gilgeous-Alexander, Wemby, Jokic finalists for NBA MVP

LOS ANGELES – Reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Shai Gilgeous-Alexander headlines the finalists announced Sunday for this year's award alongside San Antonio Spurs star Victor Wembanyama and Denver's three-time MVP Nikola Jokic.

Gilgeous-Alexander, who beat out Jokic and Giannis Antetokounmpo in the voting last year and was also named NBA Finals MVP as the Thunder beat Indiana for the trophy, averaged more than 30 points per game this season.

He led Oklahoma City to the Western Conference top seed and the best record in the league at 64-18.

Wembanyama, 22, has been the driving force of San Antonio's first run to the playoffs since 2019, averaging a career-high 25 points per game and a league-best 3.1 blocks.

Jokic averaged a triple-double and became the first player in NBA history to lead the league in both rebounds and assists in the same season. He averaged 27.9 points, 12.8 rebounds and 10.8 assists per game.

Wembanyama also headlines the finalists for Defensive Player of the Year, with Oklahoma City centre Chet Holmgren and Ausar Thompson of the Detroit Pistons also on the ballot.



Victor Wembanyama of the San Antonio Spurs talks to the media after the game against the Portland Trail Blazers during Round One Game One of the 2026 NBA Playoffs on Sunday at the Frost Bank Center in San Antonio, Texas. – AFP

Gilgeous-Alexander is also up for Clutch Player of the Year. He scored 175 points in clutch time, defined as the final five minutes of regulation or overtime when the score is within five points.

Los Angeles Lakers star Luka Doncic and Detroit's Cade Cunningham, who were both ruled eligible for awards races despite not meeting the 65-game minimum, both failed to make the final MVP ballot.

Anthony Edwards, who was ruled out of the MVP race when his request for an "extraordinary circumstances" exemption from the 65-game rule was denied, is nevertheless among the Clutch Player finalists, which isn't covered by the regulation.

The awards, which are voted on by a panel of sports media members, will be announced over the course of the playoffs. – AFP

## French Open sensation Boisson returns to action after 'most difficult' spell

### Tennis

Arthur Connan

MADRID – Lois Boisson, the French player who lit up Roland Garros last year with her stunning run to the French Open semi-finals, told AFP she cannot wait to return to action today at the Madrid Open after months out injured.

Ranked 361<sup>st</sup> in the world before the 2025 edition of Roland Garros, Boisson created a sensation by reaching the last four of the Grand Slam tournament, beating top 10 players Jessica Pegula and Mirra Andreeva in the process.

The 22-year-old backed up her maiden major appearance by winning a first tour-level title on clay in Hamburg in July and breaking into the world's top 50, but has subsequently been plagued by injuries.

"The last few months have been very difficult – the most difficult since I started playing tennis," Boisson said. "I didn't

handle them very well mentally, let's say."

The world number 46, however, added that she had "learnt some lessons" from her period on the sidelines, which "will help me in the future".

"I'm convinced I have what it takes to achieve great things in tennis," she insisted.

"I'm happy today to have come out of it stronger and to have come to terms with it all a bit."

### 'So many false starts'

Boisson has not played competitively since September, when she withdrew from the third round of the WTA 1000 event in Beijing, due to a series of injuries and, what she labelled, "medical mistakes".

She added that the extra attention following her exploits at her home Grand Slam may have contributed to the stresses on her body.

"Perhaps without realising it, it added a kind of stress, a sense of pressure – something I simply wasn't used to dealing with – all that attention surrounding me," she said.

Untimely leg niggles then an arm injury halted Boisson's star just when it appeared to be firmly on the rise.

"The two minor injuries I had to my leg weren't serious," she explained. "It was mainly this arm injury that was unexpected, to be honest, and difficult to manage."

"There were quite a few mistakes on the medical side. Each time, I was given timings that weren't realistic... That's also why there were so many false starts", such as at last week's WTA event in Rouen from which Boisson withdrew shortly before the start of the tournament.

But now Boisson is back, and she will be playing on her favoured surface, clay, at the Madrid Open, which runs from today to May 3.

"There's a really good vibe here," Boisson said.

"Being back on the circuit, at a tournament, I feel it's giving me something I haven't had for a while. It's also helping me to continue with this process of healing."

Boisson opens her debut campaign in the Spanish capital with a round-of-128 meeting with American 43<sup>rd</sup>-ranked player Peyton Stearns.

"I don't have any particular expectations," she said. "Obviously, I'm going out on court to win, to give it my all."

"But above all, I'll be absolutely delighted just to be out on court playing tennis and playing without any pain." – AFP



France's Lois Boisson holds a press conference after winning her women's singles quarter-final match against Russia's Mirra Andreeva at the French Open tennis tournament at the Roland-Garros Complex in Paris on June 4, 2025. – AFP

## Sport in brief

### Olympic status a massive 'boost' for squash says European champion Crouin

#### Squash

PARIS – European squash champion Victor Crouin believes the visibility of his sport will get a huge boost after it makes its Olympic debut at the 2028 Los Angeles Games.

Tennis, table tennis and badminton all outstrip squash in terms of licensed player participation in France but Crouin is convinced this will now change.

"The Olympics will give us notoriety," the triple European champion and world number six told AFP.

In France, there are just 22,000 licensed squash players compared to 254,000 in table tennis and over 1.2 million for tennis.

So when squash was added to the Olympic roster after the 2024 Paris Games after years of bidding for a place, Crouin was delighted.

"I couldn't believe it was true," he said. "This is now my career objective. As a squash player, I've always felt a bit excluded (from the Olympics) until now."

Places for LA are limited however to 16 male and 16 female players.

"It makes for one less match to win and a better chance of a medal," said Crouin, who studied economics at Harvard.

He believes his sport will make an attractive spectacle for fans.

"It's a spectacular sport. Squash is often described as a game of chess in a boxing ring," he said.

Other sports either added or back on the programme for the LA Olympics are cricket, flag football, baseball and softball. – AFP

### India 'extremely high' doping risk: Athletics Integrity Unit



NEW DELHI – India has been elevated to a list of nations including Russia where there is an "extremely high" risk of doping, the Athletics Integrity Unit said yesterday.

The Athletics Federation of India (AFI) joins the likes of Russia, Belarus, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria and Ukraine in the AIU's highest rating of Category A after being moved up from Category B.

Category A means India's athletes must now comply with more stringent anti-doping requirements.

The world's most populous country ranked in the top two for the most anti-doping violations in athletics between 2022 and 2025, the AIU said.

"The doping situation in India has been high-risk for a long time and, unfortunately, the quality of the domestic anti-doping programme is simply not proportionate to the doping risk," AIU chair David Howman said.

"While the AFI has advocated for anti-doping reforms within India, not enough has changed."

"The AIU will now work with the AFI to achieve reforms to safeguard the integrity of the sport of athletics, as we have done with other Category A member federations."

The AIU is an independent body tasked with fighting corruption and wrongdoing, including doping, in athletics.

India is set to host the 2030 Commonwealth Games, seen as a stepping stone for its ambition of staging the 2036 Olympics.

In the latest doping case in Indian athletics, Asian Games gold medallist archer Prathamesh Jawkar has been banned for two years.

He accepted the punishment for a whereabouts failure and will miss the Asian Games in September-October in Japan.

World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) chief Witold Banka was in New Delhi last week and said India is the biggest producer of performance-enhancing drugs.

However, he noted that India consistently leading the list of drug cheats will not hamper its chances of hosting prestigious global sporting events. – AFP

### Shen, Yan named as China's flagbearers for Asian Beach Games opening ceremony



SANYA – Beach handball athlete Shen Ping and 3x3 basketball player Yan Peng will serve as China's flagbearers at the opening ceremony of the 2026 Asian Beach Games, the Chinese delegation announced yesterday.

The Sanya Games, scheduled for April 22 to 30, will feature 14 sports, 15 disciplines and 62 events, with the aim of promoting tourism and international exchanges. It marks the second time China has hosted the Games, following the 2012 edition in Haiyang, Shandong Province.

The opening ceremony, themed around vitality, openness and joy, will be held tomorrow at Sanya Asian Beach Games Park. – Xinhua

## Who's Bad? Not Michael Jackson in new big-budget biopic

Adam Plowright

PARIS – A new Michael Jackson biopic will shortly arrive in cinemas telling the story of the King of Pop's early career, but it's a tightly controlled story that avoids any reference to the child sex abuse allegations that dogged his later life.

Titled "Michael" and beset by production and legal problems, it spans his childhood in Gary, Indiana, and climaxes with the moonwalking megastar performing in London during his Bad World Tour.

Distributors Lionsgate are hoping for global revenues of US\$700 million from a production budget of US\$200 million, which would push it close to the US\$910 million earned by "Bohemian Rhapsody" in 2018 – a record for a musical biopic.

Made by the same producer as the Queen biopic "Bohemian Rhapsody", Graham King, it features Jackson's nephew Jaafar Jackson in the main role, a 29-year-old with no previous acting experience.

"They threw me right in the deep end," Jaafar told US talk-show host Jimmy Fallon earlier this month, adding that he had been helped with the dancing by his uncle's real-life choreographers.

"It was really a surreal, spiritual moment," he said of playing one of the most recognisable characters in pop music.

### 'Controlled narrative'

Jaafar Jackson delivers a strong performance as the gloved and thrusting singer, while the concert scenes are sure to delight fans of the "Thriller" and "Bad" albums.

At the Berlin premiere on April 10, Jackson's sons Prince and Bigi were joined on the red carpet with his brother Jermaine – Jaafar's father.

All the surviving Jackson siblings are credited as executive producers, meaning they all had a right to review the film before its global release starting tomorrow.

But the involvement of the family has led to accusations that the film sugar-coats the image of

a man who was dogged by sexual abuse allegations before his death by overdose in 2009, aged 50.

His daughter Paris, who had no involvement, has been one of the most outspoken critics.

"A big section of the film panders to a very specific section of my dad's fandom that still lives in the fantasy, and they're gonna be happy with it," the actress and singer wrote on Instagram last September.

"The narrative is being controlled and there's a lot of inaccuracy and there's a lot of just full-blown lies."

### 'Human story'

A third of the original film exploring allegations against the star had to be cut and re-shot.

Lawyers for the Jackson estate realised there was a clause in a settlement with one of the singer's accusers, Jordan Chandler, that barred any mention of him in a film, *Variety* film magazine reported.

Although Jackson was never convicted in criminal or civil court, other alleged victims filed lawsuits after his death, several of which are still active.

The film was originally scheduled for release in April 18, 2025 before being pushed back by a year.

Several documentaries including 2003's "Living with Michael Jackson" and 2019's "Leaving Neverland" focused on his habit of inviting children to spend nights with him.

"I would love that the film would tell the most human story about Michael Jackson possible," Mark Anthony Neal, professor of African and African American Studies at Duke University, told AFP recently.

"But I also realise that we're in a period of time where Hollywood does not deal with celebrities in that way."

The film is almost certain to give another boost to the money-spinning family franchise.

"MJ: The Musical" opened on Broadway in 2022 and has been staged in other countries, while the Cirque du Soleil production "Michael Jackson ONE" has been running in Las Vegas since 2013.

– AFP

## Hit reality show helps rev up Japan's delinquent youth subculture

Tomohiro Osaki

TOKYO – Sporting towering Elvis-style hair and a school uniform modified into a rebellious silhouette, 15-year-old Reona worships Japan's classic bad-boy subculture recently taken global by a hit Netflix dating show.

Japan in the heady 1980s teemed with hot-blooded teens who rebelled against society through dangerous motorcycle rides, school "wars" and full-on street brawls.

Their outlandish fashion and supposed traits such as chivalry have since made them Japan's pop-culture darlings, from anime to film, despite its conformist population's disdain for rule-breakers.

The latest to capitalise on the genre is Netflix, whose recent reality show "Badly in Love" spotlighted Japan's "yankii" ("delinquent") culture by starring 11 young men and women, including former "bosozoku" ("motorcycle gang") members.

And a yankii-themed exhibition is now underway in Tokyo, re-enacting the 80s chaos with flamboyantly modified motorcycles and heavily embroidered "tokkofuku", military-style jackets worn by the bikers.

High-schooler Reona, who AFP has chosen not to name in full because he's a minor, mimics the 80s rebels by donning baggy school trousers designed to create an imposing impression.

"I think their hardcore manliness on full display is so cool," he told AFP.

A fighting spirit, loyalty to friends and straightforwardness are redeeming qualities often associated with the subculture.

Modern delinquents, meanwhile, are sometimes derided for their childish TikTok clout-chasing, online bullying and the underhanded way they scam elderly people as part of so-called "black-market part-time gigs".

Prank videos have gone viral in recent years showing teenage customers committing unhygienic antics at Japan's famed sushi conveyor-belt restaurants – so-called "sushi terrorism".

"Getting arrested for riding around your motorcycle may have some honour, but getting arrested for those sushi pranks is plain lame," Reona said.

Hirota Sotooka, 43, laughs off his eight-year-old son's precocious penchant for gangster-like attire, but draws a clear line.

The parent is willing to tolerate motorcycles, fistfights and fashion statements, but "I don't want him to bully the weak, be violent toward women or do anything purely evil", he told AFP.

"Otherwise, it's his life to enjoy," he said, proudly watching as his son strikes a perfect tough-guy pose before a bosozoku-style bike showcased at the yankii exhibition during its February iteration.

### 'Embarrassing'

Japanese teens still do make headlines vrooming recklessly, skirmishing or even duelling, but



This picture taken on February 15 shows eventgoers (from left to right) Ryusei Katsumi, Hitomi Sato, Yuki Yokoyama and Tom Akiike posing at an event that can be translated as the "Great Yankii Exhibition", in Saitama, Japan. – AFP

they are now commonly seen as less belligerent after many moved online to vent.

The number of bosozoku members, too, plummeted nearly 90 percent to 5,880 in 2024 from their peak in 1982, police data shows.

That is partly because "surveillance cameras are now everywhere" and "everyone films you on an iPhone and leaves proof of your act", Kenichiro Iwahashi, a former outlaw biker turned delinquency expert, told AFP.

With the risk of arrest much higher, bosozoku gangs as hardcore as those in the 80s known for their unlicensed, unhelmated and tokkofuku-flaunting style are "almost non-existent today", he said.

While long popular in fiction, yankii youths remain deeply frowned upon in real life for their transgressive behaviours and occasional transitions to full-fledged career criminals.

Satoru Saito, who performs as a "yankii comedian" complete with towering quiff, shaved eyebrows and tokkofuku, sometimes finds himself vilified online by those almost allergic to his "anti-social" appearance.

"For some people, this is a hard no," the 33-year-old told AFP.

"Most of these yankii folks are doing things like fighting or committing crimes, and the act of riding motorcycles at midnight can be extremely noisy, so I get why they are hated."

This makes "Badly in Love" an audacious project that few conventional TV broadcasters would have dared to green light.

From "Tokyo Revengers" to "Crows", manga and movies themed on school gangs have always made popular content as escapist fantasy.

But featuring these trouble-makers beyond fiction would have "risked exposing TV stations to criticism from the public that they are endorsing the yankii culture", influential entertainment writer Motohiko Tokuriki told AFP.

Mindful of the risk, Netflix says it went beyond strict legal compliance to "avoid sensationalism" and contextualise cast members' past slips into delinquency.

"We had extensive internal discussions... to ensure the production would not be perceived as glorifying or condoning the violence," "Badly in Love" executive producer Dai Ota told AFP.

Overall, his gamble paid off: the show, with Season 2 already set for release later this year, has maintained a weeks-long top 10 presence, including in South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.

"Our hope was to show that these young people – who have often been marginalised or labelled as 'social outcasts' – are simply youths who worry, struggle and genuinely grow."

Despite her tough, heavily tattooed exterior, Season 1 participant Otoh told AFP she is "not at all what people think of me".

The 23-year-old "introvert" now calls her past delinquency "embarrassing".

"I'd like people not to admire us, but take us as their anti-role model."

– AFP

Canva



Jaafar Jackson attends the 51st AFI Lifetime Achievement Award: A Tribute Celebrating Eddie Murphy at Dolby Theatre on Saturday in Los Angeles, California.

– AFP

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 11°C~26°C	Manila 23°C~35°C	New York 8°C~11°C	Lisbon 12°C~21°C
Shanghai 14°C~18°C	Bangkok 27°C~36°C	London 6°C~15°C	Rio de Janeiro 17°C~26°C
Hong Kong 22°C~28°C	Tokyo 12°C~25°C	Frankfurt 4°C~15°C	Luanda 25°C~29°C
Taipei 20°C~29°C	Singapore 25°C~32°C	Vancouver 11°C~16°C	Maputo 23°C~29°C
Guangzhou 21°C~31°C	Kuala Lumpur 24°C~31°C	Paris 6°C~16°C	Dili 24°C~32°C
Nanjing 12°C~17°C	Jakarta 24°C~33°C	Moscow -1°C~9°C	São Tomé 26°C~32°C
Guilin 17°C~22°C	Seoul 10°C~20°C	Las Vegas 13°C~30°C	Praia 18°C~26°C
Xi'an 8°C~11°C	Sydney 15°C~21°C	Monte Carlo 14°C~20°C	Bissau 20°C~37°C



### 1. Snowy chat

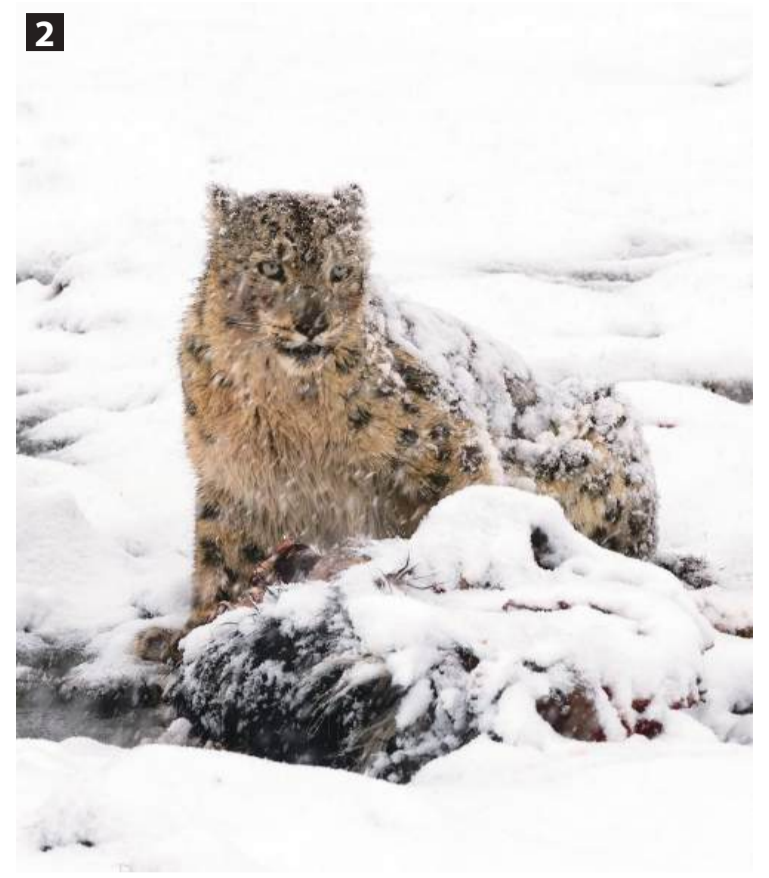
This photo taken on August 27, 2025 shows wildlife conservation officer Norbu from Nagqu and a Tibetan antelope calf at the Changtang National Nature Reserve in Xizang Autonomous Region. Changtang National Nature Reserve, a 4,500-meter-high wilderness in north of Xizang, is dubbed a "paradise for wildlife".  
- Xinhua

### 2. Shy king

A drone photo taken on April 11 shows a snow leopard at Lianbao Yeze scenic area in Aba County of Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province. Known as the "king of the snow mountains," snow leopards are under first-class national protection in China. They are native to snow-capped mountains in central and southern Asia and serve as a barometer for the health of the entire high-altitude ecosystem.  
- Xinhua

### 3. Living angel

A man feeds stray cats in a park in Tehran, Iran yesterday, amid a ceasefire that came into effect last week.  
- AFP



### 4. Sneak peek

A Muslim bride waits to get married during a mass wedding ceremony in Mumbai, India on Sunday.  
- AFP



### 5. Blooming late

People walk past a blooming sakura, Japanese cherry blossom tree, in western Moscow yesterday. In Japan the sakura blossom season - which sees branches bursting with pink and white flowers, traditionally represents fresh starts and life's fleeting impermanence.  
- AFP



### 6. Any balloon will do!

A vendor picks a character foil balloon for a customer during the Tulips Festival at the Parc de la Legion d'Honneur in Saint Denis, in the northern suburbs of Paris on Sunday.  
- AFP

