



Sam, Portuguese president vow closer ties

CE also meets Portuguese PM, Speaker, and Chief Judge



Portuguese President António José Seguro (right) meets with Macau Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai at Belém Palace in Lisbon yesterday morning (local time). – Photo: GCS



Portuguese Prime Minister Luís Montenegro (right) shakes hands with Macau Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai at São Bento Mansion in Lisbon before their meeting yesterday morning (local time). – Photo: GCS

Tony Wong

Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai, who yesterday was on the last day of his four-day working visit to Portugal, paid a courtesy call on President António José Seguro in Lisbon yesterday morning, where both sides exchanged views on topics such as advancing high-quality cooperation between Macau and Portugal in areas such as trade, culture, education, and tourism, and supporting Macau in better playing its role as a cooperation platform

between China and Portuguese-speaking countries, according to a statement released by the Macau Government Information Bureau (GCS) last night (Macau time).

During the meeting, held at Belém Palace, the official residence of the Portuguese head of state, Sam first thanked Seguro for taking time out of his busy schedule to meet with him. On behalf of the MSAR government, according to the statement, Sam extended his congratulations once again to Seguro on his resounding victory

in the February election and his inauguration as the new President of Portugal last month.

Sam also expressed gratitude for Seguro's high praise of the successful implementation of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle in Macau, which, Sam noted, demonstrates that "One Country, Two Systems" is a sound system that has gained international recognition.

According to the statement, Sam also pledged that his government will ensure the effective drawing-up and implementation of Macau's 3rd Five-

Year Plan in close alignment with the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan, adding that Macau's 3rd Five-Year Plan will outline his government's commitment to strengthening Macau's role as a service platform connecting China with Portuguese-speaking countries.

Sam also said that he expects Portugal to continue supporting Macau's international development, and to work together with Macau to facilitate the successful organisation of the 7th Ministerial Conference of the Forum for Economic and Trade Cooperation between China and

Portuguese-speaking Countries (Macao), known as Forum Macao for short, next year.

According to the statement, Sam also underlined during the meeting that the MSAR government has long spared no effort in promoting the use of the Portuguese language and supporting Portuguese-language education in Macau, pointing out that the number of Portuguese learners in Macau is now the highest since its return to the motherland on December 20, 1999.

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Iran state TV says ceasefire with US to expire at midnight GMT

TEHRAN – Iranian state TV said a ceasefire with the United States in force since April 8 would expire at 3:30 a.m. today, Tehran time (00:00 GMT yesterday; 8 a.m. Macau time today).

The timing is consistent with when the 14-day truce went into effect, though US President Donald

Trump recently said it would end a day later, this evening Washington time.

Mediator Pakistan had said earlier in the day that the ceasefire would expire at 23:50 GMT yesterday.

"Ceasefire ends at 4:50 am PST, 22 April," Information

Minister Attaullah Tarar posted on X, referring to Pakistan Standard Time.

Trump had given the Wednesday evening end date in comments to Bloomberg, and said it was "highly unlikely" he would agree to extend the truce.

Pakistan has invited the

warring sides to a second round of talks in Islamabad, but Iran has yet to formally respond, Tarar said.

He added that a decision by Tehran was "critical" before the truce expired.

Shortly thereafter, Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei said a final decision

on participating still hadn't been made.

"The reason for this is not indecision; the reason for this situation is that we are faced with contradictory messages, contradictory behaviours, and unacceptable actions from the American side," he said. – AFP

China, Mozambique upgrade ties as Xi, Chapo hold talks

President Xi Jinping and Mozambican President Daniel Francisco Chapo held talks in Beijing yesterday, and the two heads of state agreed to upgrade bilateral ties to a China-Mozambique community with a shared future in the new era.

– Story on p. 7

King Charles pays tribute to 'darling mama' on late queen's 100th birthday

Britain's King Charles yesterday paid a heartfelt tribute to his mother, the late queen Elizabeth II in a video message on what would have been her 100th birthday.

– Story on p. 10

Downing Street exerted pressure to approve Mandelson: sacked UK official

Downing Street applied constant pressure on civil servants to approve the appointment of Peter Mandelson as UK envoy to Washington and seemed to brush off security concerns, a sacked official told MPs yesterday.

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Dream Sexagenarian Restaurant highlights seniors' employability

Interview by Rui Pastorin

A cha chaan teng (tea restaurant) called "Dream Sexagenarian Restaurant of the Macau Special Olympics" quietly sits on Rua de Inácio Baptista (鵝眉街).

A non-profit social service launched in 2022 by the Macau Special Olympics (MSO), the establishment is one of the few restaurants* that mainly employs seniors. It serves various local dishes, along with daily lunch sets such as those prepared according to the Chinese 24-Solar terms** (二十四節氣). Even catering and party options, including barbecue, are also available.

The initiative's main goal? To provide a platform for seniors to show their employability to the community, along with promoting re-employment.

The seniors working at the establishment are aged over 60 and are mainly parents of and often times were also primary caretakers of MSO's service users early on in

their lives, Store Manager Shirley Ho (何寶怡) told the Post in an interview at the restaurant yesterday afternoon.

A chance to join or re-join the workforce is therefore emphasised. Ho pointed out that as MSO service users, who have intellectual disabilities, may need extra care, their parents might not have had time to work or garner much work experience over the years, or find it difficult to secure a job due to their age. Ho highlighted that working there not only allows seniors to earn extra income, but also enables them to experience a sense of self-respect and recognition, along with more self-satisfaction financially and mentally.

The staff take on roles such as working the cash desk, waiting tables, cooking and cleaning, all the while having the opportunity to warmly interact with customers. "I think they're pretty friendly. I like working with them. They're nice people to work with and talk to", Ho said.

However, it has not been without its challenges. Due to Macau's current economic issues, a shift with a preference for ordering food online, along with a competitive environment prevailing in the neighbourhood, business has been slow, even in the beginning due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

With expenses to pay, Ho admitted that times were tough. "It's hard to strike a balance throughout all these years", but she added that they may not be the only ones struggling, highlighting that most restaurants might also be having a hard time. But she noted: "It would be nice if we had more customers, actually. But it's kind of hard now", highlighting a need for support and visibility.

Still, Ho said that they are continuing to push on while also highlighting what they can offer, including their dishes, catering and party takeaway menus. But beyond that is a warm, friendly service in a place where everyone is "just like family", Ho said, noting that this remains important in the modern world where people may not even need to speak to a server to order their meal.

Highlighting their capabilities and performance, Ho stressed that neither should civil society discriminate against ageing employees and seniors in the workforce. "They're still good in the workforce and they're still enjoying it", highlighting examples of other countries like Japan or South Korea where seniors still continue to work. She also pointed out that in ageing societies, more problems could arise if there are no jobs for them.

Moreover, by dining at the establishment, Ho also noted that it was a "win-win" situation for both the customer and the elderly staff. "Because the customers, they like the elders serving them. They have more opportunities to know them



Dream Sexagenarian Restaurant Store Manager Shirley Ho (right) poses with a staff member surnamed Sou in the restaurant on Rua de Inácio Baptista (鵝眉街).



This photo shows the exterior of the Dream Sexagenarian Restaurant. - Photos: Rui Pastorin

better and to know that they're in need...They can also have a good meal while also helping them get a job to have a more stable income".

As time goes on, Ho said that they hope to send the message to civil society that the seniors can still be a part of the workforce. "They need more jobs. They can still work, they have the ability to work", she said, hoping that more restaurants or other enterprises would also hire seniors and recognise their capabilities. ■

*Another example is "Delightful Kitchen" by Caritas Macau on Rua Nova à Guia, with more on <https://www.macaupostdaily.com/news/12921>

** The 24 Solar Terms are a traditional Chinese calendar system that splits the year into 24 parts. Each part follows seasonal changes in weather, temperature, and farming cycles. Food changes with the shift to match what the body needs and what's freshest. - Poe

主辦單位: 贊助單位: 澳門基金會 協辦單位: 大哪三吧喇

蓮關三宴 · 潮宴

時間 TIME

18-19/04	11:00	壹	文創市集
25-26/04	11:00	貳	占卜水晶
01-03/05	20:00	參	傳統美食
		肆	新穎打卡

Local airport adds 3 local takeaway outlets

Rui Pastorin

Food and beverage takeaways from local brands "Your Tea", "SerrDura" and "MACOW Bread House" are now available in the airside area of the local airport's North Mezzanine Level of the Passenger Terminal Building, the Macau International Airport (MIA) said in a statement yesterday.

The takeaway services have been available since Monday, bringing in the brands through an invitation for application process.

The statement said that Macau International Airport Company Limited (CAM) entered into a two-year sub-concession contract for takeaway services with JINZHI Food and Beverage Management Company Limited, STAR DOMAIN Catering Management Co., Ltd, and SATAY BEEF Food and Beverage Limited, which respectively operate the aforementioned brands.

The statement highlighted that the initiative "not only responds to passengers' demand for health, quality, and diverse flavours, but also provides important exposure and growth opportunities for local small and medium-sized enterprises". ■



This photo provided by the local airport yesterday shows the food and beverage offered by local brands "Your Tea", "SerrDura" and "MACOW Bread House".

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Macau Weather

CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY PERIODS. ONE OR TWO SHOWERS LATER. FORCE 4 TO 5 SOUTH TO SOUTHWESTERLY WINDS WITH GUSTS. RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 65% AND 95%.



24°C~29°C

Source: SMG

Ferry operators to hike fares from Saturday

Armando Neves

Hong Kong-based TurboJET and Cotai Water Jet have announced in separate statements that the fares for their ferry routes between Hong Kong and Macau will rise from this Saturday.

According to the statements, due to the recent steep rise in fuel prices, coupled with sustained increases in the cost of goods, both companies have received approval from the Macau government to adjust their fares.

TurboJET offers four classes of travel: Economy Class, Super Class, Premier Grand Class, and Premier VIP Cabin. Fares for the Hong Kong–Macau route will rise by 10 per cent. For Economy Class, the weekday day sailing fare will increase from HK\$175 to HK\$194; the weekend and holiday day sailing fare will rise from HK\$190 to HK\$212; and the night sailing fare will soar from HK\$220 to HK\$242. Regarding the four-seat Premier VIP Cabin, the day sailing fare will increase from HK\$2,480 to HK\$2,736, while the night sailing fare will rise from HK\$3,310 to HK\$3,642. The company also stated that the discount for Macau residents and children aged 1 to 11 remains unchanged at HK\$18 per trip. Children under the age of one travel free of charge when seated on the lap of a parent or guardian.

Concerning the Macau–Shenzhen route, Economy Class tickets will rise from HK\$235 to HK\$259. Premier VIP Cabin tickets will increase from HK\$2,680 to HK\$2,948.

Further ticket price details can be viewed via the following link: <https://www2.turbojet.com.hk/travel-with-us-sea-ferry/>

According to Cotai Water Jet's statement, the ticket price for its Macau–Hong Kong weekday day sailing will rise from HK\$170 to HK\$192, while the weekend ticket price will increase from HK\$190 to HK\$209. The company further stated that prices for First Class will remain unchanged at HK\$330. Further ticket price details can be viewed via the following link: <https://www.cotaiwaterjet.com/ferry-schedule/hongkong-macau-taipa.html>

Passengers departing from Macau have the right to pay in patacas, Macau's sole legal tender.

Tickets purchased in Hong Kong will be charged in Hong Kong dollars. ■



This photo taken last October shows the Taipa ferry terminal in Pac On. – Photo: Tony Wong

Bosco Youth Service Network calls for expanded mental health support

Armando Neves

Judiciary Police (PJ) Director Sit Chong Meng told reporters at the PJ's headquarters in Zape earlier this year that its Youth Concern Section had received a total of 250 requests for assistance last year, representing an increase of 64.5 percent compared to 2024.

Sit said that most of these cases involved self-harm among students and expressed the hope that schools and parents would pay closer attention to the emotional well-being of young people.

In the wake of Sit's remarks, the *Post* interviewed Clarissa Mok Chi Ian, in charge of the Bosco Youth Service Network's Family Wellness Centre, and Michelle Chan Mei Ha, in charge of the Bosco Youth Service Network's School Social Work Department, at the centre on Rua de Francisco António recently.

According to Chan, the main sources of young people's stress fall into four categories, namely family, peer relationships, academic pressure, and social media comparison.

Mok pointed out that although the government has established a four-part collaborative mechanism involving schools, communities, hospitals and parents, the healthcare system suffers from a shortage of personnel, resulting in cases not receiving adequate follow-up after being referred to mental health specialists. Chan recommended increasing mental health resources to strengthen the support network.

Chan said that school counsellors are those most likely to meet young people at risk of self-harm.

Chan pointed out that such cases are typically identified initially either by teachers observing unusual behaviour in students – such as wearing long sleeves in hot weather, or through students actively seeking help.

The process involves conducting interviews for assessment and



Clarissa Mok Chi Ian (right), in charge of the Bosco Youth Services Network's Family Wellness Centre, and Michelle Chan Mei Ha, in charge of the Bosco Youth Services Network's School Social Work Department, pose at the centre on Rua de Francisco António during their recent *Post* interview. – Photo: Armando Neves

providing psychological counselling, according to Chan, adding that in severe cases, referrals are made to the psychiatric department of the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre.

However, Chan pointed out that the medical system has long waiting times, and due to the high volume of cases, doctors are often unable to provide an in-depth follow-up. As a result, cases are quickly referred back to the community for counsellors to continue monitoring and support, Chan said.

While civil society's acceptance of mental health issues has improved compared to a decade ago, Chan said, some parents remain resistant to their children receiving psychiatric treatment or medication, primarily due to concerns about labelling.

Mok added that in recent years, the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) has strengthened public education and destigmatisation efforts through

initiatives such as its “Guardian of Lives” programme and “Mental Health Support Group”. The bureau has also developed resource kits and promotional materials, distributing them through schools, street booths, and social media to encourage citizens to look after their own mental health and that of those around them, Mok said.

Regarding the prevalence of negative information online, Mok said that it was necessary to continuously counter this by promoting positive content and disseminating information about where to seek help to young people and parents through diverse channels, such as Instagram and WeChat.

Mok urged members of the public to intervene early if they notice someone around them experiencing emotional distress, and to make good use of the bureau's 24-hour counselling hotline and community resources to prevent problems from escalating to self-harm or suicide. ■

Spring book & culture fest promotes reading culture

Khalel Vallo

The 10-day “2026 Spring Book and Culture Festival” is underway at Tap Seac Multisport Pavilion, striving to promote Macau's reading culture with a wide selection of books and cultural activities.

The bookfair features around 50 exhibitors and more than 50,000 books, with over 20 sideline events scheduled throughout the period.

The festival, which kicked off on Friday, is hosted by the Macau Publishing Association.

The majority of books on display are in Chinese, though English and Portuguese titles are also available. The fair showcases a broad range of genres, including comics, autobiographies, educational materials, and art books.

In addition, some of the books published by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) are offered at 20 and 50 percent off.

Among participating authors in the festival is Macao Children's Literature Association Marketing Director Angela Lao En-yu, an author and animator who has won numerous awards for

her works, including the “Fun Clay” series.

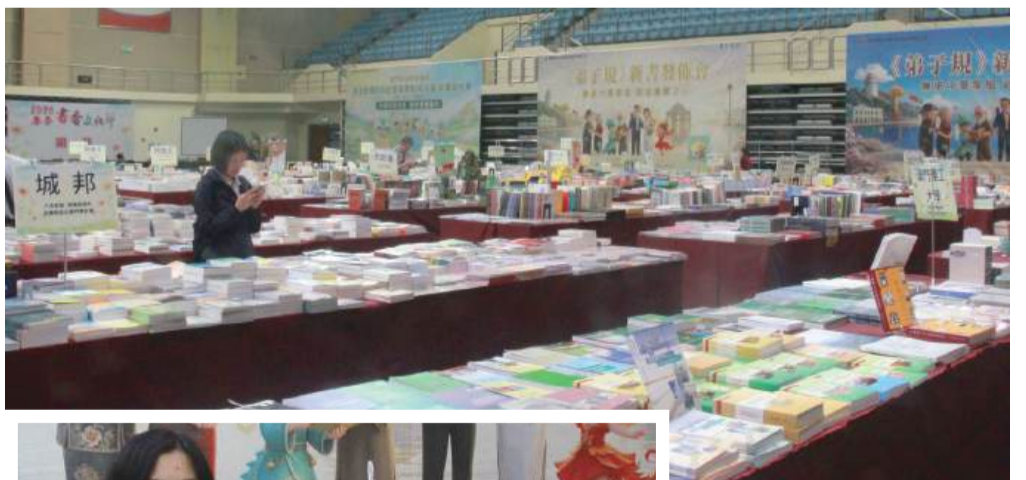
Lao presented her Chinese- and English-language books to the *Post* at the fair yesterday.

Lao pointed out that she collaborates with her team and family to create clay animation-based storybooks. “I wrote some books with my mum and my team together, and one of them is the ‘Fun Clay’ series, two books of which have been published recently”, she said.

As an animation director as well, Lao highlighted her achievements in the field, noting that her works have received more than 175 international awards, including recognition at the 2025 Slamdance Film Festival in Los Angeles, California.

Lao added that she has been publishing since childhood and has released over 130 books to date, spanning children's stories and educational materials such as English grammar books. Reflecting on her participation in the bookfair, Lao said she had joined the fair before the COVID-19 pandemic and decided to return this year after a hiatus.

Fairgoers can visit the festival through Sunday with free admission. ■



Fairgoers browse books during the 2026 Spring Book and Culture Festival yesterday afternoon at Tap Seac Multisport Pavilion.

Macao Children's Literature Association Marketing Director Angela Lao En-yu poses with her recent books at the bookfair yesterday. – Photos: Khalel Vallo

10 Fantasia exhibition celebrates 70th anniversary of Leslie Cheung's birth

Interview by William Chan

10 Fantasia Gallery, located on Calçada da Igreja de S. Lázaro, is presenting a thematic exhibition that translates the life, art, and enduring legacy of legendary Hong Kong Cantopop and cinematic icon Leslie Cheung Kwok-wing (張國榮) into a multi-faceted showcase of collective memory.

Commemorating what would have been the 70th birthday of the late superstar, affectionately known in Cantonese as “Gor Gor” (“Elder Brother”), the exhibition entitled in Chinese “Eternal Grace · Legend of Gor Gor” has transformed the second-floor gallery into a sanctuary for fans and the public alike. Since its launch on April 4, the ongoing exhibition, which is part of the “Greater Bay Area Arts and Cultural Exchange Project”, has seen an influx of visitors from the Greater Bay Area (GBA), said the exhibition’s curator Sharon Fong (方惠萍).

Fong told the *Post* in an exclusive interview at the gallery last week that the exhibition continues a series dedicated to Hong Kong’s entertainment heritage. Following showcases of Bruce Lee (李小龍) and the band Beyond in 2024 and last year respectively, the focus on Leslie Cheung was driven by her personal passion and the star’s cross-generational influence. “Beyond’s exhibition last year triggered many shared memories,” Fong noted, adding that Cheung’s achievements in music, film, and stage remain a vital pillar of Cantonese popular culture, even to this day.

To accommodate the anticipated crowds, the organisers have extended the exhibition period to two months, a departure from the usual one-month duration for the venue. The exhibition, which runs until May 24, features a rich array of rare collectibles contributed by film poster collector Lam Ka Lok from Hong Kong, local collector CK and another anonymous enthusiast.

Among the highlights are original posters from cinematic classics such as “Okinawa Rendez-vous”, “He’s a Woman, She’s a Man”, and “A Chinese Ghost Story”. The gallery also displays rare stills and memorabilia from iconic works like “For Your Heart Only” and “Rouge”.

A particularly unique feature of the exhibition is the inclusion of original artworks, including a piece by Tsui Shing On, whose work was also featured in the Bruce Lee exhibition.

Beyond visual art, the exhibition delves into the tactile history of the 1980s and 90s music scene. Visitors can view a collection of cassette tapes, CDs, and vinyl records. Fong noted that collector CK provided intriguing insights into the nuances of these physical formats, pointing out that cover designs and tracks often varied between vinyl and cassette versions of the same album. “One interesting discovery involves ‘white label’ records – promotional discs sent to radio stations before an album’s official release. CK pointed out that the version of the classic hit ‘Close To You’ on the white label disc differs to the final album version, a detail only dedicated collectors might uncover,” Fong said.

The exhibition also features nostalgic installations, including Japanese-edition videotapes and a vintage video recorder, aimed at recreating the domestic atmosphere of the era when fans would record music videos from television.

Fong observed that the exhibition has become a space for community interaction. Unlike typical galleries where visitors remain silent, this exhibition encourages dialogue. “Fans tell their stories and memories, sometimes pointing out missing details or sharing personal collections.”

This sense of community extends to families, with parents bringing children – some from overseas – to introduce them to the cultural icon of their youth. Fong underlined that while the subject is popular culture, it effectively fosters social harmony and intergenerational connection.

As the exhibition continues, Fong hopes it will serve as a platform for the ongoing preservation of Cantonese cultural heritage. “There are already discussions about a potential ‘2.0 version’ of the exhibition, which could incorporate the heartfelt messages left by visitors on the gallery’s message boards.”

The free-admission exhibition is open daily from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. at 10 Fantasia until May 24. A special session with collector CK is scheduled for this Saturday, April 25, at 2:30 p.m., where he will further discuss the stories behind his extensive collection.



Curator Sharon Fong (third from left), HK poster collector Lam Ka Lok (left), local collector CK (right) and other guests cut the ribbon at the opening ceremony on April 4 at 10 Fantasia.

– Photos provided by Fong



Sam, Portuguese president vow closer ties

Continued from p.1

Currently, Sam noted, all legal documents and government notices in the MSAR are published in both Chinese and Portuguese, many court rulings are issued in Portuguese, or bilingually (both Chinese and Portuguese), and judges and prosecutors are required to have a high level of proficiency in Portuguese.

According to the statement, Sam underlined that high-quality talent is important for Macau's future development, adding that proficiency in Portuguese is a bonus criterion under the Macau government's current talent acquisition programme, which, Sam said, is a clear indication of the importance the MSAR government attaches to the Portuguese language.

According to the statement, Seguro noted during the meeting that Portugal and China established diplomatic relations in 1979 and a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2005. The bilateral relationship has long remained friendly and close, with growing political mutual trust and frequent high-level exchanges, Seguro said.

Since the establishment of the comprehensive strategic partnership, Seguro said, the two countries have made considerable progress in economic, trade, technological, cultural, and educational cooperation, maintaining a strong momentum. Looking ahead, Seguro said, Portugal will continue to adhere to the One-China principle and, guided by the principles of mutual benefit and shared development, will keep advancing all-round cooperation with China, while continuing to support the MSAR's development.

According to the statement, Seguro also said that the friendship between Portugal and Macau goes back a long way, with close ties maintained over the years and fruitful cooperation in various fields. Portugal values the continued deepening of exchanges and cooperation with Macau, including in the joint promotion of Portuguese-language education, Seguro said, adding that he expects to see the Portuguese School in Macau, which plays a key role in Portuguese-language education, develop further.

Seguro also suggested that the two sides

jointly explore the feasibility of launching direct flights between Portugal and Macau.

After his meeting with Seguro, Sam also separately paid courtesy calls on Prime Minister Luís Montenegro, President of the Supreme Court of Justice João Cura Mariano, and President of the Assembly of the Republic José Pedro Aguiar-Branco.

During his meeting with the prime minister, Sam said that he expects continued deepening of exchanges and mutually-beneficial cooperation between Macau and Portugal in areas including trade and investment, promotion of the Portuguese language, talent development, high-tech innovation, cultural tourism, and judicial collaboration, according to GCS.

Montenegro said that Portugal is committed to deepening friendly and cooperative ties with China, and hopes to consolidate and further strengthen the traditional friendship through close and pragmatic cooperation with Macau. He stressed that Macau serves as an important gateway for Portuguese businesses to enter the Chinese market, while Portugal can likewise serve as a platform for Chinese mainland and Macau enterprises seeking access to the European market.

After concluding his four-day working visit to Portugal, Sam departed for Madrid yesterday afternoon (local time) where he will meet with the second deputy prime minister of Spain, Yolanda Díaz, and attend a Macau tourism promotion event.

Sam vows to raise Macau-Portugal cooperation to higher level

Meanwhile, during a reception hosted by the MSAR government in Lisbon on Monday evening (local time), Sam delivered a speech underlining his government's commitment to bringing Macau-Portugal cooperation across various fields to a higher level. Sam said that the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan outlines China's commitment to sharing development opportunities with countries around the world, providing broad prospects and opportunities for China-Portugal cooperation.

According to a GCS statement released in the early hours of yesterday (Macau time),

Sam noted in his speech that the MSAR government is currently drafting Macau's 3rd Five-Year Plan in close alignment with the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan, with a dedication to promoting high-quality internal reform and high-level opening-up, building a business environment that is internationalised, law-based, stable, and predictable, better leveraging Macau's unique role as a bridge and "precise connector" between China and Portuguese-speaking countries, and promoting the various platforms and mechanisms for cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking countries, with the aim of enabling Macau to become an important station for the international community, particularly Portuguese-speaking countries, to benefit from China's rapid development.

Sam, according to the statement, also said that he expects individuals and enterprises in Portugal to visit Macau, Hengqin, and various other places in the Chinese mainland with the aim of exploring investment opportunities.

The reception, which was held at MEO Arena, a multi-purpose indoor arena in Lisbon, was attended by about 400 people, including officials and business representatives of the MSAR delegation visiting Portugal, representatives from the Chinese Embassy in Portugal, and members from various segments of Portugal's civil society.

Also delivering a speech during the reception, Portugal's Secretary of State for the Portuguese Communities Emídio Sousa said that Macau and Portugal share a deep historical connection and traditional friendship, while China has been a friendly cooperation partner of Portugal, according to the statement.

Sousa said that Sam's choice of Portugal as the first leg of his first overseas visit as the chief executive is symbolic, highlighting Portugal's importance to Macau. Likewise, Sousa said, Portugal also highly values its relationship with Macau.

Sousa noted that the two sides have maintained close ties since Macau's return to the motherland, with Macau further contributing to the advancement of Chinese-Portuguese relations.

Sousa pledged that Portugal will continue

to deepen its exchanges and cooperation with Macau and build a closer relationship with the MSAR government.

According to the statement, 18 cooperation agreements between Macau and Portugal were signed during the reception, covering various fields such as trade platforms between China and Portuguese-speaking countries, sci-tech, tourism, education, big health, convention and exhibition, culture, and sport.

'One Country, Two Systems' embodies Chinese wisdom: Sam

Meanwhile, on Monday afternoon (local time), Sam also delivered a speech during the launch ceremony of an exhibition hosted by the MSAR government in Lisbon showcasing the achievements of Macau's successful implementation of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle since its return to the motherland.

According to a separate GCS statement released in the early hours of yesterday (Macau time), Sam said in his speech that the exhibition serves as a dialogue between Eastern and Western civilisations. The exhibition is not only a review of the history of Macau's development, but also an important opportunity to vividly present to the international community the implementation of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle, which embodies the Chinese wisdom, Sam said.

Sam said that since Macau's return to the motherland, with the central government's strong leadership and full support, the MSAR government has joined forces with the general public in the long journey of making Macau an exemplar of the successful implementation of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle that fits Macau's real situation and has been widely recognised by the international community.

Meanwhile, Sam also met with Portuguese Minister of State and Foreign Affairs Paulo Rangel on Monday night (local time).

After visiting Spain, Sam is also slated to pay working visits to Geneva and Brussels during his nine-day, four nation tour of Europe. He and his entourage are scheduled to arrive back in Macau on Sunday. ■

IAM orders takeaway shop to stop selling 'problematic' shrimp

Khalel Vallo

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) has ordered a takeaway shop in the Areia Preta district to stop selling a "problematic" marinated raw shrimp dish after a sample was found to contain excessive levels of bacteria, according to a statement by the bureau yesterday.

The statement said that a routine food inspection detected an excessive amount of *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* in a sample of "Chaozhou-style marinated raw shrimp".

The affected sample was collected from the takeaway shop "醉強吃貨" ("Strongest Foodie"), the statement said, adding that the test results were classified as "unsatisfactory" under the guidelines for microbiological limits in ready-to-eat food.

According to the statement, the authorities immediately ordered the shop to remove the product from the menu and cease selling it. The operator has also been required to rectify food preparation procedures and ensure compliance with hygiene standards before resuming sales of the Chaozhou-style marinated raw shrimp, subject to reinspection, the statement noted.

In addition, the staff at the outlet must attend food safety and hygiene training courses to strengthen their awareness and handling practices, the statement said, adding that the bureau reminded food businesses to verify the origin and specifications of ingredients before procurement and to strictly follow food safety principles such as separating raw and cooked items to prevent cross-contamination.

Vibrio parahaemolyticus is a Gram-negative, halophilic (salt-loving) bacterium commonly found in marine environments and seafood, the statement said. While it can be eliminated through thorough cooking, consuming raw or undercooked seafood may lead to infection. Symptoms typically appear within two to 48 hours and include diarrhoea, abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting and fever, lasting up to five days.

The bureau urged residents, particularly the elderly, pregnant women and those with weakened immune systems, to avoid eating raw or undercooked seafood and to seek medical attention if symptoms occur after consumption, the statement concluded. ■



This undated handout photo provided by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) yesterday shows the "problematic" marinated raw shrimp dish from a takeaway shop in Areia Preta district.

China, Laos boost energy ties with new 500-kV cross-border power link

KUNMING/VIENTIANE – China’s first 500-kV cross-border alternating-current power link went into operation on Monday, marking a new step in energy cooperation between China and Laos.

The project, the largest and highest-voltage power connection between the two countries, triples cross-border transmission capacity from 50 megawatts to 150 megawatts. It is expected to transmit 3 billion kWh of clean electricity annually, 30 times the capacity of previous lines.

The project not only serves as a tangible connection of infrastructure, but also strengthens the bond between the two peoples, and supports the optimized allocation of clean energy between the two countries.

GREEN, SMART CORRIDOR

Construction began on February 26, 2025. The 177.5-km line includes a 145-km section in China built by China Southern Power Grid (CSG) and a 32.5-km section in Laos constructed by Électricité du Laos Transmission Company Limited (EDL-T).

“Nearly 1,200 Chinese and Lao constructors from 70 participating units completed the project in over 400 days of transnational collaborative work, overcoming challenges such as tight construction schedules and complex grid connection technologies,” said Meng Zhenping, chairman of the CSG.

Lin Rui, chairman of the EDL-T, said the project is like a “power highway,” effectively enhancing the power exchange capacity between



Lao Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone (center) officiates at a commissioning ceremony for the China-Laos 500 kV power grid interconnection project in Vientiane, Laos, on Monday. A commissioning ceremony for the China-Laos 500 kV power grid interconnection project was held simultaneously on Monday in Lao capital Vientiane and Kunming in Yunnan Province, marking a significant boost in power connectivity and mutual support capacity between the two countries. – Xinhua

China and Laos and the power supply capacity in northern Laos.

The Chinese section of the project runs through Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve and Asian elephant habitats, requiring strict environmental protection measures. The route was optimized in the design stage to avoid protected areas and residential areas.

An Asian elephant early-warning system was deployed along the line so as to help minimize impact on local elephant population and ensure the safety of the construction work.

In one instance, drones detected a herd approaching, prompting operators to raise flight altitude and slow transport to allow the animals to pass safely.

Smart technologies were also

used, including digital monitoring across the line and artificial intelligence (AI)-powered robots and robotic dogs for inspections.

“The robot dog is equipped with an AI platform, which can automatically identify equipment status and perform infrared temperature measurement, with data transmitted in real time,” said Yang Yao, a duty officer of China Southern Power Grid Yunnan Power Grid (CSG-YNPG).

Huang Weijie, deputy general manager of the CSG-YNPG, said the project opens a channel for power connectivity and clean energy mutual assistance in the Lancang-Mekong region, setting a benchmark for regional green infrastructure.

PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE BOND

Beyond physical connectivity, the project has strengthened coordination in power dispatch, standards and management, expanded training and knowledge exchange, laying a foundation for long-term cooperation.

The CSG is also promoting cross-border participation in its regional electricity market to support regular clean energy trading, said Zhang Shaohui of the company’s Lancang-Mekong unit.

More than 500 Lao workers who took part in the project attended multiple training sessions, including bilingual safety and technical programs.

A Chinese-Lao bilingual

technical dictionary covering 4,900 terms was compiled to support communication among engineers.

“Previously, I knew nothing about the operation and maintenance of high-voltage power grids. Now, I can independently complete the equipment inspection tasks,” said Bounmy Songsavat, a 28-year-old Lao technician trained under the program.

The project also brings tangible livelihood benefits to local communities in Laos, including building a primary school and five bilingual reading rooms, launching the country’s first sign-language audiovisual program, and supporting local industry development and infrastructure improvement.

Since 2022, China and Laos have implemented a power-sharing mechanism, with more than 1.6 billion kWh of two-way electricity exchange recorded by the end of 2025. The new link is expected to further improve Laos’ ability to balance supply during peak and off-peak periods.

Lao Minister of Industry and Commerce Malaithong Kommasith said the project will become a key artery in the country’s power sector once operational. He noted that it will help ease domestic transmission constraints and support the development of renewable energy in northern Laos.

“The project will effectively boost the economic and social development of both countries, accelerate the green and low-carbon energy transition, and bring the benefits of modern power development to the peoples of China and Laos,” said Meng, chairman of the CSG. – Xinhua

China welcomes more US-funded enterprises to deepen mutually beneficial cooperation: Vice Premier He

BEIJING – China welcomes more US-funded enterprises, including GE HealthCare, to keep deepening mutually beneficial cooperation with China and share the opportunities brought by China’s vast market and high-quality development, Vice Premier He Lifeng said yesterday.

He, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist

Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks during a meeting with Peter J. Arduini, president and CEO of GE HealthCare.

He noted that China’s economy has made a good start this year, showing strong resilience and vitality.

During the 15th Five-Year Plan period (2026-2030), He said, China will unswervingly expand high-

level opening up and keep building a first-class business environment.

Arduini said that GE HealthCare is fully confident in its long-term development in China, will continue to deepen its presence in the Chinese market, and is willing to contribute to promoting economic and trade cooperation between the United States and China. – Xinhua

15 years on, Hainan’s offshore duty-free shopping policy generates sales of over US\$41 billion

HAIKOU – Fifteen years after China launched the offshore duty-free shopping policy in Hainan, its southernmost island province, customs authorities have supervised a cumulative 286.4 billion yuan (US\$41.7 billion) in offshore duty-free sales, involving 347 million items, according to local customs authorities.

Since its launch on April 20, 2011, the policy has undergone multiple rounds of adjustments and optimization. Today, Hainan hosts

12 offshore duty-free stores across the island.

In June 2020, China unveiled a master plan to build the whole of Hainan Island into a globally influential and high-level free trade port by the middle of the century. The initiative reached a major milestone in December last year with the launch of island-wide special customs operations, which marked the completion of the first key step toward that goal.

The move has turned the island

into a special customs supervision zone, allowing freer trade between Hainan and areas outside China’s customs borders, while enforcing standard customs controls for goods moving from Hainan to the mainland.

Since the launch of island-wide special customs operations, travelers leaving the Chinese mainland border via Hainan have spent nearly 67.72 million yuan on shopping under the offshore duty-free policy. – Xinhua

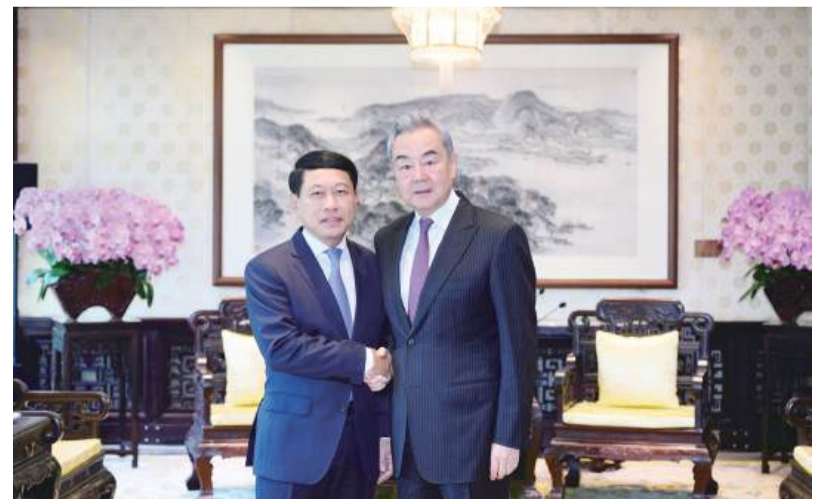
China, Canada to further increase passenger, cargo flights

BEIJING—China and Canada will further increase passenger and cargo flights between the two countries to meet the growing demand for economic and trade exchanges as well as cross-border travel, the Civil Aviation Administration of China said yesterday.

The flight increase arrangement

was reached following a new round of consultations between the civil aviation authorities of the two countries, the administration said.

Under this arrangement, the two sides agreed to further boost passenger flights between China and Canada and double each side’s weekly cargo flight quota from 10 to 20. – Xinhua



Foreign Minister Wang Yi (right), also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, shakes hands with Lao Deputy Prime Minister Saleumxay Kommasith, who is visiting China as special envoy of Thongloun Sisoulith, general secretary of the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party (LPRP) Central Committee and president of Laos, in Beijing yesterday. – Xinhua

China, Mozambique upgrade ties as Xi, Chapo hold talks

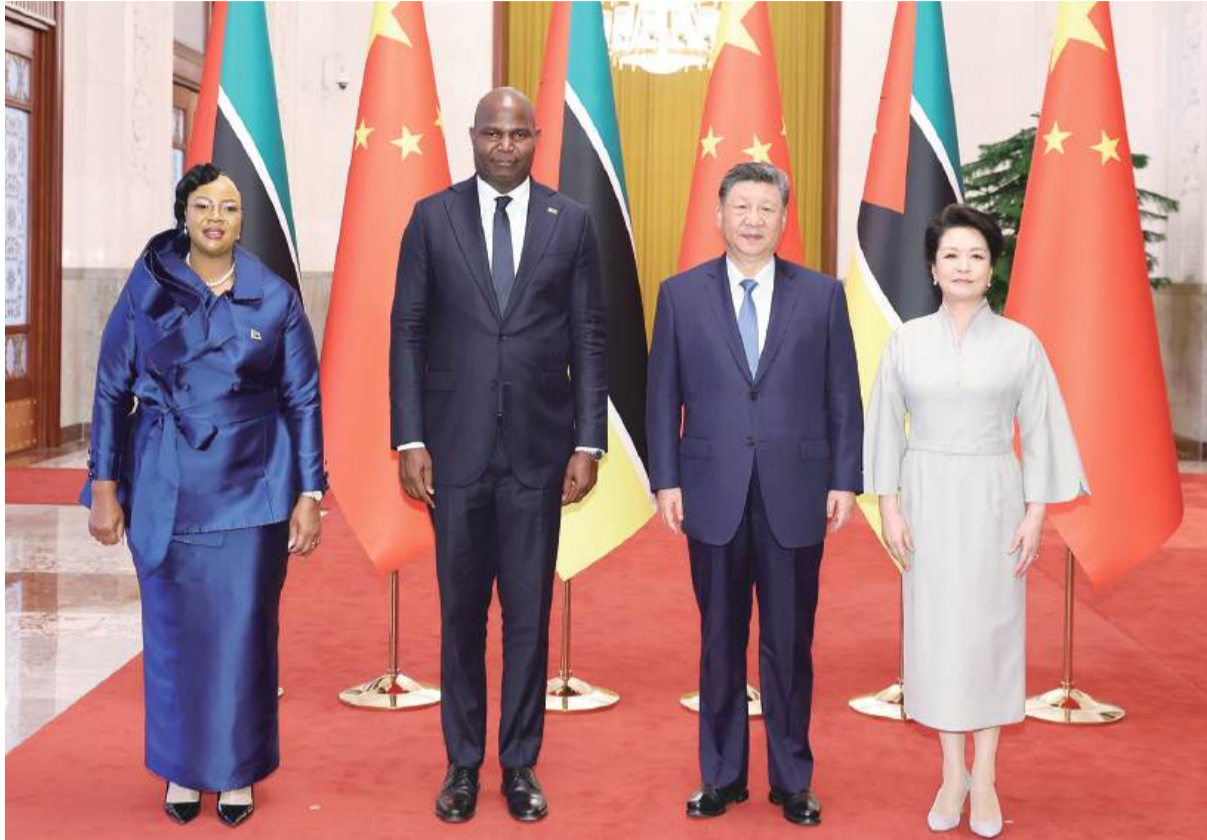
BEIJING – President Xi Jinping and Mozambican President Daniel Francisco Chapo held talks in Beijing yesterday, and the two heads of state agreed to upgrade bilateral ties to a China-Mozambique community with a shared future in the new era.

Noting that the time-honored friendship between China and Mozambique has set an example for China-Africa relations and South-South cooperation, Xi said that under the new circumstances, deepening China-Mozambique friendly cooperation meets the shared expectations of the two peoples and reflects the prevailing trend in the Global South to strengthen solidarity and collaboration in jointly tackling challenges.

China is ready to work with Mozambique to take the implementation of the outcomes of the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and the China-Africa Year of People-to-People Exchanges in 2026 as an opportunity to jointly pursue modernization, Xi noted.

Friendship and mutual trust are the defining features and political strengths of China-Mozambique relations, Xi said, adding that the two sides should continue to firmly support each other on issues concerning each other's core interests and major concerns, promote exchanges at various levels and in various fields including governments, political parties, legislative bodies and local exchanges, and deepen experience sharing in party and state governance.

He pointed out that China and Mozambique enjoy strong economic complementarity and broad cooperation prospects. Noting that this year marks the beginning of China's 15th Five-Year Plan period, Xi said China stands ready to strengthen the alignment of development strategies with Mozambique, explore new models of cooperation, break new ground in infrastructure development and the comprehensive development of energy and mineral resources, foster new growth areas of cooperation



President Xi Jinping (second from right) and his wife Peng Liyuan (right) pose with President of the Republic of Mozambique Daniel Francisco Chapo (second from left) and his wife Gueta Chapo ahead of the talks between Xi and Chapo at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. Xi held talks with Chapo, who is on a state visit to China, in Beijing yesterday. – Xinhua

in agriculture, new energy, digital economy and artificial intelligence, and advance high-quality and sustainable growth of practical cooperation between the two countries.

Faced with a complex and volatile international landscape, the two sides should continue to step up coordination and collaboration within the United Nations and other institutions, work in solidarity to champion an equal and orderly multipolar world and a universally beneficial and inclusive economic globalization, and jointly safeguard international fairness and justice, Xi emphasized.

Over the 70 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Africa, amid shifting international dynamics, the two sides have stood together through thick and thin and forged ahead side by side, Xi said, noting that the Global South, represented by China and African nations, has always been a force for justice in a world marked by turbulence and transformation.

As the impact of the Middle East conflict spills over to African countries, China stands ready to work hand in hand with Africa to address these challenges, jointly promote peace and work together to advance development, Xi said, calling on both sides to uphold the principles for peace, maintain the resolve for development, and promote win-win cooperation.

He said both sides should uphold principles to advance peace, jointly call for a ceasefire and an end to hostilities, advocate resolving differences through equal dialogue, advance the international community's practice of true multilateralism, and firmly safeguard the purposes and principles of the UN Charter as well as the basic norms governing international relations.

Calling for staying focused on pursuing development, Xi said China has always accorded special priority to Africa in the course of steadily expanding high-standard opening up.

China will fully implement zero-

tariff measures for the 53 African countries with diplomatic ties starting May 1 this year, and further expand market access for African exports to China by upgrading green channels and other related measures, according to Xi.

He also called on both sides to foster a model of win-win cooperation, adding that China is ready to respond to the aspirations of African countries, tap into cooperation potential, strengthen mutually beneficial cooperation, support Africa's development, and jointly build an all-weather community with a shared future between China and Africa in the new era.

For his part, Chapo noted that it is a great pleasure to be the first leader of an African country to pay a state visit to China this year. He congratulated China on its remarkable achievements, and on China's exemplary role among Global South countries.

Mozambique attaches great importance to its relations with China, unconditionally abides

by the one-China principle, and supports China in achieving national reunification, Chapo said.

He expressed Mozambique's readiness to work with China, on the basis of mutual respect and mutual trust, to consolidate solidarity and friendship, and enhance cooperation in areas including economy and trade, agriculture and energy, opening up new chapters in jointly building the Mozambique-China community with a shared future in the new era.

Noting that the implementation of the outcomes of the FOCAC Beijing Summit and China's zero-tariff policy for African countries having diplomatic ties with China will provide strong impetus to the economic and social development of African countries, Chapo said Mozambique thanks China for its support for African countries.

Hailing the vision of a community with a shared future for humanity, the four major global initiatives, and the Belt and Road Initiative which have made important contribution to promoting world peace, stability and development, Chapo said Mozambique is ready to work with China to implement these initiatives and make the world a better place.

Following the talks, the two heads of state jointly witnessed the signing of over 20 cooperation documents in areas including Belt and Road cooperation, implementation of the Global Security Initiative, economy and trade, people-to-people exchanges, healthcare, and news media.

The two sides issued the Joint Statement Between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Mozambique on Building the China-Mozambique Community with a Shared Future in the New Era.

Before the talks, Xi and his wife Peng Liyuan held a welcoming ceremony for Chapo and his wife, Gueta Chapo, at the Great Hall of the People.

Xi and his wife Peng also held a welcoming banquet for Chapo and his wife Gueta Chapo yesterday evening. – Xinhua

Li Qiang meets Mozambican president

BEIJING – China will help Mozambique extend its industrial chains, increase added value and better turn its resource advantages into development momentum, Premier Li Qiang said yesterday.

Li made the remarks when meeting with President of the Republic of Mozambique Daniel Francisco Chapo, who is on a state visit to China.

China stands ready to strengthen the alignment of development strategies with Mozambique, steadily expand

the scale of bilateral trade, and deepen cooperation in fields such as agriculture, fisheries, energy and mineral resources, and infrastructure construction, Li told Chapo.

Li called on Mozambique to make good use of the zero-tariff policy for all products from African countries with diplomatic ties to China, as well as the upgraded "green channels," to explore the Chinese market.

Noting that China supports competent Chinese enterprises to invest in Mozambique, Li expressed

the hope that Mozambique will provide a stable and predictable business environment and safeguard the safety, legitimate rights and interests of Chinese enterprises and citizens there.

The two sides should also strengthen cooperation in healthcare, education, culture, tourism, disaster prevention and mitigation, among other areas, he said.

Given the changing international landscape, China and Africa should strengthen solidarity and collaboration,

actively implement the four major global initiatives, uphold fairness and justice, and safeguard shared interests, Li added.

Mozambique supports China in achieving national reunification and backs China's stance on issues concerning Xinjiang, Xizang and human rights, Chapo said.

Thanking China for its long-standing support and assistance in Mozambique's economic and social development, Chapo said Mozambique is willing to strengthen the alignment of national development plans with

China and deepen cooperation in areas such as trade, investment, agriculture, energy, transportation and telecommunication under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

He added that Mozambique firmly supports the four major global initiatives put forward by President Xi Jinping, and stands ready to work with China to strengthen Africa-China cooperation and jointly promote the building of a community with a shared future for humanity.

– Xinhua

Japan's remilitarization, presence in Philippines undermine peace, stability: expert

MANILA – Japan is undermining regional stability by returning its combat troops to Philippine soil for the first time in 81 years since the end of World War II, a Filipino expert said.

“Japan’s right-wing government towards aggressive militarization is a foreboding of imminent dangers to the peace, stability and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region, including the Philippines,” Herman Tiu Laurel, president of a Manila-based think tank, told Xinhua in an exclusive interview.

As the Philippines and the United States kicked off their annual Balikatan military exercises on Monday, Japan, no longer merely an observer, has dispatched over 1,000 combat troops to participate in the largest-ever Philippines and US military drills, in

which over 17,000 troops are engaged.

“The return of Japan’s combat forces to the Philippines poses blatant challenges to the outcomes of the World Anti-Fascist War victory,” Laurel said.

Following the outbreak of WWII, Japan occupied the Philippines in 1942. Since then, the Japanese forces committed a litany of atrocities, including the Manila Massacre, the Bataan Death March and the forced recruitment of “comfort women,” a system of sexual slavery, claiming the lives of over a million Filipinos.

Laurel noted that the Japanese authorities have recently actively demanded that the Self-Defense Forces be enshrined in the Constitution, while continuously expanding its armaments and advocating possession of

nuclear weapons.

“These signs of the resurgence of right-wing forces could become a ‘ticking time bomb’ for regional security,” Laurel said. He added that Japan’s expansionism is laid bare, noting that its plutonium stockpile is sufficient to produce 5,500 nuclear warheads, and its draft defense budget was set at a record US\$58 billion for fiscal 2026.

“In fact, the rise of Japan’s neo-militarism is part of its collusion with the United States to pursue imperialist expansion in the Asia-Pacific,” he said, adding that Japan serves as Washington’s proxy to contain emerging economies in the Asia-Pacific region.

Commenting on recent moves, such as the Philippines’ signing

of a defense pact with Japan and consenting to the United States deploying more missiles and building fuel depots, Laurel warned that Filipinos should remain vigilant.

“The US and Japan are shaping the Philippines into a ‘frontline position’ against other countries. This exposes Filipinos to the risk of conflicts and seriously endangers regional stability,” he said.

Laurel called on the Filipino people to remember history, firmly safeguard national and regional peace, and cherish relations with China, as their bilateral friendship has historical roots.

After the Japanese occupation in WWII, overseas Chinese in the Philippines established guerrilla forces and waged an arduous struggle

against Japanese troops. Over 70 members of the Chinese guerrillas sacrificed their lives during the fight.

Laurel said that China remains a pragmatic and responsible partner. He pointed out that the Philippines has an urgent need to deepen cooperation with China in fields such as energy, tourism, trade and agriculture.

“The Philippines should draw on China’s experience – channeling its resources fully into economic development – and pursue modernization through peaceful development,” Laurel emphasized.

“We must distinguish our genuine friends and uphold an independent foreign policy. Any attempt to revive militarism and undermine regional stability is bound to fail,” he added. – Xinhua

6 die in north Philippine residential fire

MANILA – Six people were killed in a house fire in northern Philippines early Monday, said local authorities.

The fire broke out in the kitchen of a house in the city of Urdaneta,

Pangasinan province. Then the blaze rapidly spread and trapped the victims, said the city’s Bureau of Fire Protection.

The victims were three males and three females, including two

11-year-old girls. Two houses were destroyed.

The fire was declared out at 4:49 a.m. local time. Investigators have not yet determined the cause of the fire. – Xinhua

Indonesia court throws out case against minister over 1998 mass rape denial

JAKARTA – An Indonesian court dismissed yesterday a lawsuit against Culture Minister Fadli Zon for having publicly denied that mass rapes occurred during deadly riots in 1998 targeting mostly ethnic Chinese in the country.

In the unrest sparked by an economic crisis and anger over corruption, some protesters had turned on Chinese Indonesians, stereotyped as wealthy traders or financiers.

Hundreds of Chinese-owned homes and businesses were looted and razed as rape squads reportedly led by army thugs roamed Jakarta’s streets. A fact-finding report found at least 52 alleged cases of rape in the unrest.

Last year, in an interview with

local media outlet IDN Times, Fadli said: “Was there really mass rape? Who says so? There’s no proof”.

This prompted a civil society coalition to file a lawsuit against Fadli, arguing he had “distorted historical facts and erased victims’ suffering”.

After more than seven months of proceedings, the Jakarta State Administrative Court issued a ruling in favour of the minister, declaring the plaintiffs’ claim “inadmissible”.

The court did not give reasons for its ruling, which was published online.

The plaintiffs, which include Amnesty International and former attorney general Marzuki Darusman, were ordered to pay legal fees of 233,000 rupiah (US\$14).

Amnesty in a statement expressed disappointment over the ruling.

“Survivors of the May 1998 rapes are still fighting for justice, yet the state allows denial of this gross human rights violation to continue without accountability,” the group said.

The 1998 riots are widely seen as having helped precipitate the fall of dictator Suharto.

The incumbent president, Prabowo Subianto, once served under Suharto as a military commander, but was dismissed in disgrace in the aftermath of the riots, having admitted to ordering the abduction of activists.

The United States for years had refused him a visa over his rights record, but he denied any wrongdoing and was never charged. – AFP

6 people hurt but no serious damage from powerful Japan quake

TOKYO – At least six people were reported injured yesterday, a day after a powerful quake rattled northern Japan, but there appeared to be no major damage from the tremor that also triggered tsunami waves up to 80 centimetres.

However, the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) also warned of an increased risk of a megaquake – a tremor with a magnitude of 8.0 or stronger – hours after Monday’s 7.7 magnitude quake in Pacific waters off northern Iwate prefecture.

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

Six people were reported injured by 8 a.m. [local time], two seriously, the Fire and Disaster

Management Agency (FDMA) said in a statement.

There were no reported fire outbreaks or damage to important facilities, it said.

Japan issued a warning for tsunami waves of up to three metres but it was lifted hours after an 80-centimetre wave hit a port in Kuji in Iwate, one among a series of small waves that hit elsewhere in northern Japan.

The JMA 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, the FDMA 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. – AFP



A marine robot is on display during the Singapore Maritime Week (SMW) 2026 in Singapore yesterday. Singapore Maritime Week (SMW) 2026 runs from April 20 to 24 this year, bringing together more than 20,000 participants from nearly 80 countries and regions, including ministers, senior government officials, industry leaders and maritime professionals. – Xinhua

Indonesia passes long-awaited law to protect domestic workers

JAKARTA – Indonesia’s parliament passed a law yesterday to protect the rights of domestic workers after more than two decades of deliberations and multiple delays.

The bill was first introduced in 2004 to protect the country’s 4.2 million domestic workers, almost 90 percent of them women according to data from the Ministry of Manpower.

They were previously not legally classified as workers, meaning they were forced to operate in an informal and unregulated economy, exposed to exploitation and abuse.

Cheers and claps erupted from the audience as House Speaker Puan Maharani brought down the gavel during yesterday’s plenary session to indicate the law had been adopted.

“The enactment of a Law on the Protection of Domestic Workers aims to provide legal certainty for both domestic workers and employers, and to prevent all forms of discrimination, exploitation, and abuse against domestic workers,” Minister of Law Supratman Andi Agtas told the plenary.

Domestic workers will now be entitled to vocational training, health and unemployment benefits.

The law also specifically prohibits the hiring of children under 18 as

domestic workers – a common practice in a country where less than a third of people complete high school.

The legislation does not quantify a minimum wage, but provides for a 12-month period to work out supporting regulations, including penalties for those who flout the law.

The Jala PRT domestic workers’ rights group, which had been advocating for the law, hailed it as a “historic” moment.

“Most domestic workers are women workers who have been neglected all this time; now there is recognition and protection,” Jala PRT coordinator Lita Anggraini told AFP.

But she warned “the struggle is not over” and a public education campaign would be needed to teach employers about their responsibilities.

The group reported more than 3,300 cases of violence against domestic workers between 2021 and 2024, including physical and psychological abuse, economic exploitation, even human trafficking.

In 2023, nine people in South Jakarta, including a 70-year-old woman, were given sentences of up to four years for abusing and torturing a young domestic worker who was beaten, burnt with cigarettes, and chained to a dog cage. – AFP

Malaysia working to address climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, official says

KUALA LUMPUR – Malaysia is working to face a triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, with the challenges posed by these needing long-term solutions, an official said yesterday.

These crises together represent one of the defining generational challenges that are reshaping ecosystems, economies and societies, Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability Minister Arthur Joseph Kurup said in his remarks at the Climate Change and Sustainability Conference 2026.

“Across the globe, the impacts of climate change are becoming increasingly evident. We are witnessing unprecedented heatwaves, extreme rainfall events, prolonged droughts and rising sea levels,” he said.

“Malaysia is no exception. Recent years have brought severe floods, coastal erosion, changing rainfall patterns and increasing climate variability that affect our water

resources, food security, infrastructure and public health,” he said.

Noting the scope and scale of climate challenges requiring international cooperation, Arthur said Malaysia will continue to be an active participant in international platforms aimed at combatting climate change.

“Malaysia remains committed to contributing constructively to global efforts to address these crises,” he said, adding that Malaysia aspires to hit its peak greenhouse gas emissions by 2029, provided that enabling conditions and support are in place.

“This is a significant milestone for a developing economy that is still deeply intertwined with energy-intensive sectors. Beyond the peak, Malaysia commits to achieving an absolute emissions reduction of 15 to 30 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent by 2035, relative to the peak level,” he said. – *Xinhua*

Afghan families stripped of everything as floods ravage homes, harvests

JALALABAD – “We have nothing. We don’t have a house to live in, and we don’t have anything to wear either,” said Shir Khan, standing amid the mud and silt that now fill his courtyard in a village on the outskirts of Jalalabad city, the capital of eastern Afghanistan’s Nangarhar province. “The flood destroyed everything.”

The raging waters not only swept away all the family’s household belongings but also destroyed every room and the kitchen. Shir Khan, who once supported his eight-member family by renting a rickshaw, is now desperately planning to rebuild a few basic living rooms so his family can have shelter again.

For now, they are forced to spend their days and nights with great difficulty in their neighbors’ homes. “Building one room costs around 200,000 to 300,000 afghanis (about US\$3,120 to US\$4,680), and we cannot afford to construct it,” Shir Khan told Xinhua inside his full of silt courtyard in Zengawee area, Jalalabad city, about 120 km east of the capital Kabul.

Just a short distance away, landowner Haji Sayed Ghani watched the same scene of destruction. His family of 10 depends entirely on the wheat harvest from his fields for their livelihood.

The crop was only weeks away from being gathered when the floods struck. “All the people were waiting for the harvest from the fields,” he said. “The flood has caused a lot of damage; all the agricultural lands have been destroyed.” “All the people are poor; no one can solve their problems on their own,” Ghani said.

Provincial disaster management officials in Nangarhar confirm that the recent floods have killed 15 people and injured more than 80 others in the

province, while destroying hundreds of acres of farmland.

Reza Osmani’s losses are even heavier. The flood destroyed both his house and his agricultural land. “Water came from several directions and shattered the agricultural lands and houses,” he said.

Like his neighbors, Osmani had pinned all his hopes on this year’s harvest to feed his family of nine for the coming year. “We don’t have any other income; our income is from agriculture. The flood destroyed our agriculture.”

He explained that every family affected in the area is trying to repair their homes and fields, but without outside help it is impossible. “About 250 to 300 residential houses have been submerged and 600 to 700 acres of agricultural land have been smashed,” Osmani said.

More than 73,000 people have been affected by recent floods in 31 out of the country’s 34 provinces, according to the United Nations Population Fund. Displaced families, particularly women and girls, face acute challenges in accessing healthcare, while immediate needs for food, emergency shelter, cash assistance and psychosocial support remain largely unmet.

Meanwhile, official data from Afghanistan’s National Disaster Management Authority paints an even graver picture nationwide: natural disasters such as heavy rain, windstorms, earthquakes, and landslides have killed 189 people and injured 253 others in the past three weeks. The disasters have completely or partially destroyed more than 7,000 residential homes and washed away over 21,000 acres of agricultural land in one of the world’s most vulnerable countries. – *Xinhua*

UN urges Sri Lanka to deliver results in Easter bombing probe

COLOMBO – The United Nations urged Sri Lanka yesterday to deliver concrete results after long-running investigations into the 2019 Easter Sunday suicide bombings that killed 279 people, including 45 foreigners.

The UN’s top envoy to the country, Marc-Andre Franche, said survivors and families of victims were still waiting for answers, despite multiple probes and renewed political pledges following the formation of a new government in September 2024.

“Public commitments by the government to pursue justice are important and must be welcomed,” he said, as the nation marked seven years since the bombings yesterday.

“But what matters now is results,” he said at a remembrance service in Colombo.

Islamist bombers struck three churches and three hotels on April 21, 2019, in the island’s deadliest ever attack on civilians.

Several investigations, including a parliamentary probe, have pointed to the involvement of state intelligence units.

In October 2021, Sri Lanka’s state prosecutor indicted 25 people, accusing them of being co-conspirators in the bombings. The case is ongoing.

Police enquiries took a new turn in February with the arrest of the former head of the State Intelligence



People take part in a silent march outside St. Sebastian’s Church in Katuwapitiya, Sri Lanka yesterday marking the seventh anniversary of the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings. – AFP

Service, retired army major general Suresh Sallay, who is accused of aiding and abetting the attackers.

Sallay has denied the allegations and is being held under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Investigators have also alleged a plot to exploit the attacks to create instability and pave the way for Gotabaya Rajapaksa to win power.

Rajapaksa, the younger brother of former president Mahinda Rajapaksa, announced his presidential bid two days after the bombings and won the November 2019 election.

However, he was toppled in July 2022 after being accused of corruption and mismanagement, which contributed to the country’s worst economic meltdown.

Rajapaksa has also denied involvement in any conspiracy.

At a remembrance ceremony at St. Anthony’s Church, where 51 people were killed, Catholic leader Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith said political interference had obstructed justice.

“An honest search for the truth behind some of the murders, disappearances and acts of corruption has become extremely difficult due to political interference and lying,” he said.

Security was tight at the commemoration, with armed military personnel guarding the church as diplomats and religious leaders observed two minutes of silence following the ringing of church bells. – AFP

US limits intel sharing on N Korea over Seoul comments: reports

Claire Lee

SEOUL – The United States has partly restricted the sharing of satellite intelligence on North Korea with South Korea due to remarks by Seoul’s unification minister about one of Pyongyang’s nuclear facilities, reports said yesterday.

Chung Dong-young told South Korea’s parliament last month that North Korea was suspected of operating a uranium enrichment site – a key step in making a nuclear bomb – in the northwestern Kusong region.

Washington, South Korea’s security ally, lodged protests over Chung’s comments, saying they disclosed sensitive information from US intelligence without authorisation, according to the South’s Yonhap news agency and multiple local outlets.

It has “limited” some satellite information on the North that was previously routinely handed over to Seoul, the reports said.

The restrictions have applied “since the beginning of this month” but “(do) not significantly affect military preparedness”, an unnamed South Korean military official was quoted as saying by Yonhap yesterday.

“Intelligence collection and sharing regarding North Korea’s military activities are proceeding normally between South Korean and US authorities, just as before,” the official reportedly said.

Neither South Korean nor US authorities have explicitly denied that restrictions have been imposed.

United States Forces Korea (USFK), Washington’s military presence in the country, told AFP yesterday that it was “aware of the media articles” and had “nothing to add”.

A spokesperson for South Korea’s unification ministry said Monday that Seoul “did not receive any information” about the Kusong facility “from any other agency”.

‘Clear fact’

North Korea is known to operate uranium enrichment facilities in Yongbyon, in the north, and Kangson, near the capital Pyongyang.

Chung has come under pressure from opposition parties over the disclosure and its repercussions for ties with Washington.

He said on Monday it was “deeply regrettable” that his remarks had been interpreted as a leak of classified information, insisting that they were based on publicly available information and had been raised at his confirmation hearing in July.

President Lee Jae Myung has defended Chung, writing on X that it is a “clear fact” the existence of the Kusong facility was already widely known through academic papers and media reports.

“Any claims or actions premised on the assumption that Minister Chung leaked classified information provided by the United States are wrong,” Lee added.

South Korea explicitly denied a Yonhap report, citing an opposition lawmaker, saying that USFK Commander Xavier Brunson had lodged a protest with Defence Minister Ahn Gyu-back over Chung’s remarks.

It would not have been diplomatically “appropriate” for Brunson to make such a complaint, the defence ministry said, without mentioning the reported satellite intelligence sharing curbs.

‘Very serious increase’

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

Pyongyang is showing a “very serious increase” in its ability to produce atomic weapons, the head of the UN nuclear watchdog said during a visit to Seoul last week.

The United States stations about 28,500 troops in South Korea to help it fend off military threats from the North.

It is believed to gather intelligence through satellites, electronic intercepts and other means, and share it with Seoul. – AFP

King Charles pays tribute to 'darling mama' on late queen's 100th birthday



Britain's King Charles III looks at a scaled sculpture by Martin Jennings, depicting Britain's Queen Elizabeth II, during a presentation on the final design recommendation for the Queen Elizabeth Memorial, during a visit to the British Museum in central London yesterday, on the day marking what would have been the late monarch's 100th birthday.

— AFP

Helen Rowe

LONDON — Britain's King Charles yesterday paid a heartfelt tribute to his mother, the late queen Elizabeth II in a video message on what would have been her 100th birthday.

The king's moving homage came as the final plans for a memorial for the nation's longest serving monarch were unveiled.

Referring to Elizabeth as "darling mama", Charles, 77, said she had "remained constant, steadfast and wholly devoted to the people she served" throughout her long life.

The monarch died aged 96 in September 2022, after a 70-year reign.

"Much about the times we now live in, I suspect, may have troubled her deeply, but I take heart from her belief that goodness will always prevail and that a brighter dawn is never far from the horizon," the king said in his message.

"For as a young Princess Elizabeth put it in her first ever public broadcast, aged just 14, we can each play our part 'to make the world of tomorrow a better and happier place'.

"It is a belief which I share, with all my heart," he added.

The memorial to the queen will feature a statue by sculptor Martin

Jennings of her as a young woman dressed in ceremonial robes.

The bronze likeness takes inspiration from a celebrated 1955 portrait of her by Italian artist Pietro Annigoni.

The combined statue and plinth will stand 7.3 metres high at the entrance to the memorial in London's St James's Park, close to Buckingham Palace.

The king told architect Norman Foster during a viewing at the British Museum that the design was "fantastic".

Unity bridge

The memorial will feature a family of gardens through the park with meandering paths and a new translucent glass unity bridge, inspired by Elizabeth's wedding tiara.

There will also be a smaller statue of her late husband Prince Philip dressed in his naval uniform looking up at his wife.

Charles and other members of the royal family viewed maquettes of the planned statues and a scale model of the wider memorial on a visit to London's British Museum yesterday.

Elizabeth, who was born on April 21, 1926, was not expected to become queen.

An accident of history brought her to the throne after her uncle Edward VIII abdicated in order to marry the twice-divorced American Wallis Simpson in 1936.

After the abdication, her reluctant father, who suffered from a severe stammer, became King George VI.

But his death in 1952 saw the young princess accede to the throne aged just 25, setting the stage for her record-breaking reign.

Since her death, the royal family have endured a turbulent time as a result of illness, family estrangement and scandal.

Both Charles and his daughter-in-law Catherine, wife of his elder son Prince William, have battled cancer, while his younger son Prince Harry wrote a wounding tell-all memoir after quitting royal duties with his wife Meghan.

William and Catherine, the Prince and Princess of Wales, paid their own tribute to the late queen yesterday with a message praising her on social networks for "inspiring generations through a lifetime of duty".

Charles's brother Andrew meanwhile is facing a police probe amid new revelations about his ties to the late US sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

— AFP

US regulator 'closely monitoring' shaky private credit market

WASHINGTON, DC — US securities regulators are "closely monitoring" problems in the private credit market seen as a rising risk, a senior Trump administration official said yesterday.

In an address at the Washington Economic Club, Paul Atkins, chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), described "opacity" as a concern in a market that has grown in the wake of stiffer regulation on conventional banks after the 2008 financial crisis.

"The SEC is closely monitoring both the lending gap that private credit has filled and the emerging pressures that it has recently experienced, including elevated

redemption requests and rising default rate projections," Atkins said.

Worries about the sector have percolated for months after bankruptcies last year pointed to problems of collateral being pledged to multiple debt holders. Investment giants such as Apollo Global and Blackstone saw large redemption requests in the first quarter.

Atkins urged caution before investing in private credit, the growth of which he described as a "natural result of the heavy-handed regulation that forced banks to get out of the business of financing small and growing enterprises," he said.

"Let me be clear that opacity in this space can be an issue,

that valuation transparency and credit quality are key, that higher fees and less liquidity must be taken into account regarding the appropriateness of the investment," Atkins said.

Executives from large banks such as JPMorgan Chase and Goldman Sachs have described difficulties in the private credit market as a watch item but not a systemic risk.

Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said late last month that the central bank is watching the space "super carefully" but doesn't see evidence of systemic risk, calling private credit "a relatively small part of a very large asset pool."

— AFP

Harvey Weinstein rape retrial hears opening arguments

Ben Turner

NEW YORK — The retrial of disgraced US movie mogul Harvey Weinstein, accused of raping actress Jessica Mann, got underway yesterday with lawyers presenting their opening arguments to a 12-member jury.

Weinstein, a focal figure of sexual assault allegations that spurred the "MeToo" movement, will remain imprisoned for other offenses regardless of the verdict.

The judge declared a mistrial on the allegations by Mann last June after the jury foreperson refused to return to deliberate the case amid a jury-room feud.

Weinstein, 74 and wheelchair-bound by ill health, is being retried on a count of third-degree rape in the New York state supreme court in Manhattan.

He is already serving a 16-year prison term in a California case for the rape of a European actress more than a decade ago.

He is appealing that conviction, and another from the trial in June.

Before their foreperson quit, the jury convicted Weinstein of sexual assault against movie

producer Miriam Haley and acquitted him of the same alleged crime against Polish-born actress Kaja Sokola.

Weinstein has hired a new legal team including Marc Agnifilo, who represents high profile figures including rapper Sean "Diddy" Combs.

The Oscar-winning Weinstein has claimed to be under threat at the notorious Rikers Island jail complex in the Bronx where he is being held, leaving him mostly in solitary confinement.

"I'm constantly threatened and derided. I wouldn't last long out there," he told the *Hollywood Reporter* at the start of the year.

Weinstein was known for his fiery temper, and the industry had long been rife with suggestions that he took advantage of his power to sexually exploit women.

In 2017, blockbuster investigations by the *New Yorker* and *The New York Times* laid bare a series of claims by young women that triggered an avalanche of allegations from more than 80 complainants and prompted the global #MeToo movement.

— AFP



Former Hollywood film producer Harvey Weinstein appears in Manhattan Supreme Court during his retrial in New York City yesterday. Weinstein is accused of the third-degree rape of Jessica Mann, who starred in the 2015 romantic comedy "This Isn't Funny."

— AFP

Mexico pyramid shooting was 'planned' attack: officials

MEXICO CITY — Mexican security officials said yesterday that a recent shooting at the world-famous Teotihuacán pyramids that left one person dead and 13 others wounded "wasn't spontaneous".

As authorities grappled with the security breach that occurred just weeks before Mexico hosts several World Cup football matches beginning in June, President Claudia Sheinbaum called for tighter gun controls at tourist areas.

The suspect, identified as 27-year-old Mexico City resident Julio César Jasso Ramirez, "made preliminary visits on multiple occasions to the archaeological site, stayed in hotels near the site ahead of time, and from there planned his violent acts," Mexico State Prosecutor José Luis

Cervantes Martínez told reporters.

The Mexican attacker shot dead a Canadian and then died by suicide on the pyramid — less than an hour's drive from Mexico City — after military operatives approached and began to engage him.

At least 13 people were injured as they fled the chaos, including some who suffered gunshot wounds.

Following the shooting, Sheinbaum yesterday urged that gun controls be tightened at tourist sites.

"We need to have better security to make sure someone can't enter an archaeological site, a tourist site, with a firearm," she said at her morning press conference, barely seven weeks before Mexico City hosts the World Cup's opening match on June 11.

— AFP

In Portugal, Lula urges return to multilateralism

LISBON – Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva yesterday championed trade multilateralism, saying Brazil seeks commercial ties “without preference” with partners from China and the United States to Russia and France.

“Since we do not favour a second Cold War... we have no trade preferences,” the leftist leader said following a meeting with Portuguese Prime Minister Luis Montenegro.

“We want to have relations with China, with the United States, with Russia, with France. We want relations with everyone without preference.

“What we want is multilateralism and a great deal of peace so we can negotiate,” he added.

Mulling the evolution of global trade, Lula criticised moves away from free trade towards protectionism by some powers, without mentioning any by name, just as emerging

economies seek to carve out their own role.

In the 1980s, “we were told that free trade and globalisation were the most fantastic things, and in Brazil we were rather against them,” owing to poor competitiveness, Lula said.

“But when we began to become competitive... those who had defended free trade became protectionists,” he complained.

Lula, 80, who began a European tour last week, also met with his Portuguese counterpart José Seguro for their first face-to-face talks since Seguro took office in March.

Outside the presidential palace, Portuguese far-right leader André Ventura joined a small group of demonstrators to protest at Lula’s visit on grounds of alleged “corruption”.

A counter-demonstration in Lula’s support took place nearby, organised by the Portuguese branch of Lula’s Workers’ Party.

– AFP



Portuguese President António José Seguro (right) shakes hands with Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva at Belém Palace in Lisbon prior to their meeting yesterday. – AFP

Downing Street exerted pressure to approve Mandelson: sacked UK official

Joe Jackson

LONDON – Downing Street applied constant pressure on civil servants to approve the appointment of Peter Mandelson as UK envoy to Washington and seemed to brush off security concerns, a sacked official told MPs yesterday.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s office had a “dismissive attitude” towards the security vetting for its US envoy pick, said Olly Robbins, the foreign ministry’s most senior official before being fired last week.

He was appearing at a watchdog parliamentary committee, as Starmer remained mired in the scandal over Labour grandee Mandelson’s appointment, which has haunted him for months.

The Foreign Office subsequently green-lit Mandelson – who had long been known to have close ties to the late US sex offender Jeffrey Epstein – despite the government now confirming independent vetting officials had recommended security clearance be denied.

That revelation, first reported by *The Guardian* last Thursday, has prompted fresh calls for Starmer to resign, after he previously insisted all “due process” had been followed.

The beleaguered British leader has blamed officials for deliberately keeping him in the dark about the security clearance issue, and on Monday denied misleading parliament with his previous statements on the scandal.

In his much-anticipated testimony, Robbins provided a more nuanced assessment, insisting he formally approved Mandelson after vetting officials – housed in another government department – concluded he was a “borderline” case.

“I was briefed that ... they were leaning towards recommending that clearance be denied but that the Foreign Office security department assessed that the risks ... could be managed and/or mitigated,” Robbins told MPs.

“I was also told that the risks did not relate to Mandelson’s relationship with Jeffrey Epstein,” he added.



In this video grab taken from footage broadcast by the UK Parliamentary Recording Unit (PRU) via the Parliament TV website yesterday, former permanent under-secretary at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), Olly Robbins speaks on the work of the FCDO in the Boothroyd Room at Portcullis House, Westminster in London. Robbins has stepped down from his role as the government faced fresh pressure over its past appointment of Peter Mandelson, an associate of Jeffrey Epstein, as US ambassador. – AFP

‘Pressure’

UK media has reported that the concerns surrounded the links of Mandelson’s now-shuttered lobbying firm to Chinese companies.

Robbins recalled when he became the foreign ministry’s top official in January 2025 there was a “very strong expectation ... coming from Number 10 (Downing Street) that he needed to be in post and in America as quickly as humanly possible”.

“I’m afraid what that translated into for my team in the Foreign Office... was what I felt was a generally dismissive attitude to his vetting clearance,” he said.

“My office, the foreign secretary’s office, were under constant pressure, there was an atmosphere of constant chasing.”

Mandelson was named to the coveted top diplomatic post in December 2024, just weeks before US President Donald Trump was inaugurated the following month, and took up the job in February 2025.

Asked about the possibility of denying Mandelson security clearance, Robbins conceded that would have been a “difficult problem I would have been landing the foreign secretary with and the prime minister with”.

But he insisted “that was not

what was on my mind as we took this decision” while also noting a denial would have “damaged” UK-US ties.

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

‘Bad pick’

UK police are now 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 and has not been charged. Mandelson denies criminal wrongdoing.

Overnight, Trump, who has criticised Starmer over a perceived lack of support for his Iran war, waded into the controversy.

He agreed on his Truth Social platform that Mandelson “was a really bad pick” for the Washington job.

But in a slight sign of encouragement, Trump added: “Plenty of time to recover, however!”

Starmer said on Monday he has instigated a review of the security vetting process. But former civil servants have accused him of scapegoating Robbins.

– AFP

Germany, Italy reject suspending EU-Israel cooperation deal

LUXEMBOURG – Germany and Italy yesterday rebuffed calls to suspend an EU cooperation deal with Israel, despite rising anger over the war in Lebanon and the situation in the West Bank.

Spain and Ireland had put the issue of halting the June 2000 agreement back on the table at a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Luxembourg.

German Foreign Minister Johann Wadepuhl called the proposal “inappropriate”.

“We have to talk with Israel about the critical issues,” he said, adding: “That has to be done in a critical, constructive dialogue with Israel.”

Italian counterpart Antonio Tajani pushed back as well, saying yesterday that “no decision will be taken today”.

Attitudes towards Israel among EU member states, already hardened over its conduct in the war in Gaza, have stiffened further after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and a new law on the death penalty for Palestinians in the occupied West Bank.

“We need to act. We need to make sure that our fundamental values are protected,” Irish Foreign Minister Helen McEntee said.

Reticence

Facing alarm at the civilian toll

exacted in the Gaza war, the EU last year already put on the table a raft of potential measures to punish Israel, including cutting trade ties or sanctioning government ministers.

But so far none of the steps laid out by Brussels has garnered enough support from member states to be put into action.

Suspending the entirety of the EU’s cooperation agreement requires unanimity among the bloc’s 27 countries and would almost certainly be blocked by allies of Israel.

More feasible could be suspending the part of the deal

facilitating closer trade ties, a move that only requires support from a weighted majority of EU countries.

But that would require a shift in position from EU heavyweights Germany or Italy.

Rome had appeared to signal it could be open for a tougher line on Israel after it suspended a defence agreement.

“The measures that we have already on the table that require qualified majority will require states shifting their position,” Kallas said after the meeting.

“We didn’t see that today, but these discussions will continue.”

Meanwhile, there were efforts to

advance smaller measures instead.

France and Sweden re-upped an earlier call from some other EU countries for the bloc to consider halting the import of goods from Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, which are considered illegal under international law.

A separate proposal for sanctions on “extremist” Israeli settlers in the West Bank had been vetoed by Hungary for months.

But the recent ouster of staunch Israel backer Viktor Orban in Hungarian elections has raised hopes among other EU countries that those could soon go into force.

– AFP

Pope calls for ‘law and justice’ on Equatorial Guinea visit

MALABO – Pope Leo XIV yesterday urged Equatorial Guinea to place itself “in the service of law and justice”, on the first day of his visit to the west African country.

The US-born pontiff arrived in the Spanish-speaking nation for the fourth and final stage of his marathon 11-day tour of the continent.

In Malabo, the former capital on Bioko island in the Gulf of Guinea, he was welcomed by Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, who has been in power since 1979 and at 83 is the world’s longest-serving head of state who is not a monarch.

At the presidential palace, the pope used a less sharp tone than on his previous three stops, calling on authorities in the country to “evaluate its own paths of development and the positive opportunities of positioning itself on the international stage in the service of law and justice”.

“It is even more evident today than in years past that the proliferation of armed conflicts is often driven by the exploitation of oil and mineral deposits, occurring with no regard for international law or the self-determination of peoples,” he said in a speech.

Hydrocarbon production accounts for 46.1 percent of GDP and more than 90 percent of exports in Equatorial Guinea, the African Development Bank (AfDB) said in 2024.

Leo was following in the footsteps of John Paul II 44 years ago, who was the first pope to set foot in oil-rich Equatorial Guinea, 80 percent of whose two million people are Catholic – a legacy of Spanish colonisation.

During his flight to Malabo from Angola, Leo paid tribute to



Pope Leo XIV (left) shakes hands with Equatorial Guinea's President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo after meeting with authorities, community representatives and the diplomatic corps at the Presidential Palace in Malabo on the ninth day of an 11-day apostolic journey to Africa yesterday. – AFP

Pope Francis, a year to the day since his death.

“He lived as close as possible to the poorest, the most vulnerable, the sick, children, and the elderly,” he told reporters.

At Semu market, in central Malabo, reactions to the visit were mixed, with some vendors hoping to profit from the pope’s arrival, while others voiced reservations.

“The pope is coming for the country’s leaders. His visit won’t do anything for us, because he’s not coming to persuade the ruling class to take our suffering and grievances into account at the expense of their own enrichment with the country’s resources,” said Anita Oye, a tomato seller.

The majority of the population remains poor despite one of the highest per capita incomes in Africa, due in particular to oil revenues.

Some feared that the country’s people will have to foot the bill, including Andrés Esono Ondo, who heads the country’s only approved opposition party, the Convergence for Social Democracy.

Ondo feared that the trip would cause even more suffering among a population forced to bear “the economic damage”, which he assumed was “something the pope does not wish for”.

“For the pope to come among us... is a divine blessing, without distinction of race or political affiliation,” Jovino Abaga, a young activist from the ruling Democratic Party of Equatorial Guinea (PDGE), told AFP.

Pope Leo is due to take three flights today, and travel to Mongomo, President Obiang’s native stronghold, then to Bata, the economic capital.

– AFP

Cuba confirms recent talks with US delegation

HAVANA – A senior Cuban diplomat on Monday confirmed recent talks in Havana with US officials, as the island faces a deep crisis over President Donald Trump’s pressure campaign.

“I can confirm that a meeting between delegations from Cuba and the United States was recently held here in Cuba,” Alejandro García, the foreign ministry’s under-director of Cuba-US affairs, told the Communist Party newspaper *Granma*.

García said that the negotiators included assistant secretaries from the US State Department and Cuba’s deputy foreign minister.

On Friday, the US online news outlet Axios reported that Trump administration officials had held multiple meetings in Havana on April 10 with Cuban officials, including Raúl Guillermo Rodríguez Castro, grandson of former president Raúl Castro.

The US negotiators laid out

several conditions for negotiations with Cuba to continue, according to Axios, which cited a US State Department official.

García denied the claims on Monday.

“During the meeting, neither side set deadlines or made any threatening statements, as has been reported by the US press. The entire exchange was respectful and professional,” he said.

He emphasised that ending a three-month-old US oil blockade of the island was “a top priority” for the Cuban government in the talks and accused Washington of “blackmail” for threatening countries that export oil to Cuba with tariffs.

The Trump administration began implementing a policy of maximum pressure on Cuba after its January 3 overthrow of Venezuela’s socialist president Nicolás Maduro, Cuba’s foremost backer.

The oil blockade has aggravated the country’s worst economic and energy crisis in decades, leading to warnings of a humanitarian disaster.

Cuba has been bracing for a possible attack following repeated warnings from Trump that Cuba is “next” on his list after the ouster of Maduro and the US-Israeli attacks on Iran.

The leftist leaders of Mexico, Spain and Brazil on Saturday voiced concern over the “dramatic situation” in Cuba and urged “sincere and respectful dialogue.”

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said on Monday there was no evident justification for the United States to attack Cuba.

“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.

– AFP

EU clears Lisbon metro bid after Chinese firm kicked out

BRUSSELS – The EU gave its green light yesterday to a bid to build a metro line in Lisbon after a Polish manufacturer replaced a subsidiary of Chinese rail giant CRRC.

Portuguese giant Mota-Engil led a consortium which partnered with subcontractors including the Portuguese subsidiary of Chinese state-owned CRRC, and they made a bid last year to develop the new Lisbon line.

Then in November, the European Commission launched a probe to investigate whether CRRC had an unfair advantage due to foreign subsidies, which a senior EU official said were worth billions of euros.

Brussels said yesterday it had accepted the consortium’s commitments to replace Portugal CRRC with Polish rolling stock manufacturer PESA, which “has not received distortive foreign subsidies”.

The EU probe was launched under the Foreign Subsidies Regulation (FSR), which has forced Chinese companies to abandon or curtail projects in recent years.

Beijing has previously said the EU’s implementation of the rules has discriminated against Chinese firms and described them as “trade and investment barriers”.

The EU insists it is focused on tackling possible market distortions.

“From the very beginning of this mandate, we committed to making full and systematic use of the FSR as a key tool to protect our single market against unfair practices,” EU industry chief Stéphane Séjourné said in a statement.

“Today’s [April 21] decision on the Lisbon metro shows that our efforts bring results. We remain vigilant to protect public procurement procedures from distortive practices, while maintaining our openness to trade and investment,” he added. – AFP

Spanish court rules Jehovah’s Witnesses can be called ‘destructive sect’

Marie Giffard

MADRID – A Spanish court has ruled that critics of Jehovah’s Witnesses may describe the religious group as a “destructive sect” without risking defamation claims, citing protections for free expression.

Jehovah’s Witnesses, a US-based Christian evangelical movement best known for its door-to-door preaching, have regularly filed lawsuits against those who criticise the group’s practices.

The Provincial Court of Madrid upheld a 2023 ruling in favour of the Spanish Association of Jehovah’s Witnesses Victims (AEVTJ), finding that its public criticism of the group does not unlawfully damage its right to honour or reputation.

The court said describing Jehovah’s Witnesses as a “destructive sect” falls within the scope of protected free speech under Spanish law, even if it is offensive to the religious organisation, according to a ruling dated April 16 seen yesterday by AFP.

Saying that belonging to Jehovah’s Witnesses “harms health, endangers people’s lives, or creates victims” also falls under freedom of expression, “even if it is unpleasant or hurtful”, the ruling added.

The case stems from a legal complaint brought by six Spanish Jehovah’s Witnesses, who argued that the use of the word “victims” in the association’s name was defamatory and sought its dissolution.

Carlos Bardavío Antón, a lawyer representing the association, described the ruling as unprecedented.

“This is the first time that, in a country, it has been stated that a religion can be described as a ‘destructive sect’, even if it is

formally registered as a religion,” he told AFP.

Founded in 1919, the association now has 740 members, including some who are still Jehovah’s Witnesses.

“Validates our voice”

AEVTJ president Samuel Ferrando told AFP he was “very satisfied” with the decision, saying it “validates our voice and our right to define ourselves as victims”.

“And it confirms that many of their practices show they can be described as a dangerous sect. Until now, any media outlet that dared to describe them as a sect risked being sued by Jehovah’s Witnesses,” he added.

Jehovah’s Witnesses did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The ruling is not yet final and may still be appealed to Spain’s Supreme Court.

Jehovah’s Witnesses, founded in 1870 by pastor Charles Taze Russell in Pennsylvania, claim to have around nine million followers worldwide.

The group preaches non-violence and opposes blood transfusions, believing blood is sacred.

A number of cases involving parents refusing to allow their sick children to receive transfusions have made headlines over the past decades.

It is a millennial faith, meaning its members believe that the end of the world is near and that God’s kingdom will soon rule over the Earth.

Critics also say it is difficult to leave, with some former members saying they faced emotional pressure to remain or were shunned after abandoning the religion. – AFP

Eta appointment 'no surprise' for Union Berlin's ascendant women

Daniel Wighton

BERLIN – The appointment of Marie-Louise Eta as head coach of Union Berlin's men's Bundesliga side may have captured global headlines, but few inside the ambitious club were surprised.

The rapid rise of Union's women's side, who Eta will coach from the summer, is a direct result of the club prioritising the team.

While still in the amateur regional leagues, Union took the unusual step of paying players and coaching staff professionally.

Union are putting the finishing touches on a shiny new complex which will become the first training centre in European football with identical facilities for the men's and women's teams.

Despite playing in the second division last season, Union's women averaged crowd was 7,190, the best mark in Germany and behind only Arsenal, Chelsea and Manchester United across Europe.

The crowds have continued to climb this season as Union secured their top-flight status for next year.

Union host powerhouse Bayern Munich today and the club expect over 10,000 spectators, having opened up additional stands in their 22,000-capacity Stadion an der Alten Foersterrei.

'It's about football'

A major reason for the support is the club's integration into the community in the eastern Berlin suburb of Koepenick

The club is a core part of Koepenick's identity, giving rise to the saying: 'We don't go to the football, we go to Union'.

Current women's coach Ailien Poese has had a two-decade association with Union and has guided the women's side through the ranks to the top flight.

Poese, who will return to the club's academy when Eta takes over, said fans went to both the men's and the women's games "because ultimately it's about football."

"I hope it gets established at many clubs, that it's their favourite club and there might be a home

game every weekend, one week the women's and the next the men's," Poese told AFP.

"I'm absolutely delighted with the extra attention and the identification with the women's team."

Union forward Hannah Eurlings agreed. "It says a lot about the fans, that they're just in love with the club. And that's so nice to see."

Eurlings, a Belgian international, signed with Union in the summer and said the club's focus on women's football was a key pull factor.

"For me it was a bit scary to sign for a second Bundesliga team... But the talks I had with the club and with the women's manager, they were all positive."

"They want to make the women's team equal to the men's team and also in financial things and also in the facilities we get. I think you don't find that that often in women's football, so I think that's a very big plus for me."

'Not a bit of a surprise'

Eurlings said Eta's appointment is a reflection Union's values of hard work and merit, while also thinking outside the box.

"It's not a bit of a surprise here in the club or in Koepenick... It doesn't matter what your gender is, do you know a lot about football? You're the right person for the job."

Poese said the appointment was "a completely logical decision."

"She is highly competent, very good technically and very clear in her work and her footballing ideas."

Union are heavy underdogs today but even taking on the German giants is an achievement in itself.

Bayern need just a point to claim the women's Bundesliga title but Poese said her side would relish their role as "party crashers".

Eurlings agreed, saying "of course it's an extra motivation. They think they can become champions on our pitch? Nobody signed up for that."

"They're the best team in the league. But of course, in football, you have 90 minutes and if we have a good day, we want to be the party crashers."

The game will be played at 12 a.m. tomorrow morning Macau time.

– AFP/MPD

LIGUE 1

PSG and Luis Enrique sweat on Vitorinha ahead of Champions League semis



Lyon's Brazilian defender Vinicius Abner (second right) shoots the ball past Paris Saint-Germain's Portuguese midfielder Vitorinha (left) but fails to score during the French L1 football match between Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) and Olympique Lyonnais (OL) at the Parc des Princes stadium in Paris on Sunday. Lyon won 2 - 1.

– AFP

PARIS – Paris Saint-Germain coach Luis Enrique said yesterday he was unsure if midfield metronome Vitorinha would be fit to play against Bayern Munich in the Champions League semi-finals.

The Portuguese central midfielder will miss PSG's Ligue 1 clash against Nantes today due to a heel inflammation.

"We'll take a calm and measured approach to see how the injured players can make a comeback. But I don't know," he told reporters when asked if Vitorinha would be back in time for next Tuesday's semi-final first leg at the Parc des Princes.

"We need to manage Vitorinha's minor injury; some players are a bit tired or have a few niggles," the Spaniard also told PSGTV.

Should the 26-year-old be unavailable, his place at the heart

of the PSG midfield could be filled by the returning Fabian Ruiz.

Alongside Vitorinha and Joao Neves, Ruiz formed the midfield trio that anchored much of PSG's success last season as they won a maiden Champions League title and lifted the Ligue 1 trophy.

The Spaniard returned for the final 18 minutes of PSG's 2-1 league loss at home to Lyon last weekend as he continues his comeback from a knee injury.

Luis Enrique cooled expectations on the 30-year-old, however, as he said Ruiz would need "time to regain fitness" after spending three months on the sidelines.

"Fabian Ruiz needs more matches and minutes to recover," Luis Enrique insisted, before adding he was nonetheless "happy" with his return against Lyon.

The former Barcelona and

Spain coach warned that even as PSG close in on a repeat of their double-winning season this term, he still demands "more" from all his charges.

Exciting Senegalese 18-year-old Ibrahima Mbaye was not included in the squad for Sunday's defeat to Lyon, with Luis Enrique explaining: "Every minute you get to play for PSG must be special."

"I have no regrets about Mbaye, but you have to be ready. He was ready, but I expect much more from all the players."

Victory in the French capital against Nantes today would send PSG three points clear of surprise Ligue 1 title challengers Lens with five matches remaining in the campaign.

The game will be played at 1 a.m. Tomorrow morning Macau time.

– AFP/MPD

Man City, Inter, Chelsea and Juve to face off pre-season in HK

Football

HONG KONG – English and Italian football giants Manchester City, Chelsea, Inter Milan and Juventus will square up for pre-season friendlies in Hong Kong in August, the clubs announced yesterday.

Pep Guardiola's Manchester City, currently arm-wrestling Arsenal for the Premier League title, will take on Inter Milan on Saturday, August 1, spearheaded by their Norwegian goal machine Erling Haaland.

The match will kick off the "Hong Kong Football Festival" at the city's futuristic 50,000-seat Kai Tak stadium.

The gleaming arena opened a year ago, featuring a roof that can be closed and air-conditioning to combat the fierce summer heat and humidity in Hong Kong.

Chelsea will play Juventus on

Wednesday August 5 to round off the mini-tournament.

Inter, under former Romanian international Cristian Chivu, are eight points clear at the top of Serie A as they look for a 21st title, second only to Juventus who have won a record 36 Italian top-flight championships.

Juventus are fourth and looking to secure a Champions League spot under Luciano Spalletti.

Chelsea beat PSG to win the Club World Cup in the United States last year but have since parted company with then manager Enzo Maresca.

Liam Rosenior took charge but is under pressure to keep his job after Chelsea lost five of their last six Premier League matches to drop to sixth, seven points adrift of the Champions League places.

It remains to be seen whether Rosenior will still be in charge when Chelsea land in Hong

Kong as they were also drubbed 8-2 on aggregate by PSG in the Champions League last 16.

All the teams will hold open training sessions ahead of the matches giving Hong Kong fans an extra chance to see star players such as City's Gianluigi Donnarumma, Chelsea's Cole Palmer, Inter's Lautaro Martinez and Juventus's Dusan Vlahovic.

The action does not stop there for fans in the football-mad southern Chinese city, as Bayern Munich and Aston Villa have already announced they will play a friendly in Hong Kong on Friday, August 7.

During pre-season last year, 50,000 sell-out crowds in Hong Kong watched Liverpool play AC Milan and Tottenham face Arsenal in the first north London derby outside of the UK.

Tens of thousands also turned out to watch the teams' open training sessions.

– AFP



Barcelona's Spanish forward Lamine Yamal poses with the Young Sportsman Award during the 27th Laureus World Sports Awards gala in Madrid on Monday.

– AFP



Wembanyama wins NBA defensive player of the year

LOS ANGELES – San Antonio Spurs star Victor Wembanyama was named the NBA's defensive player of the year on Monday, becoming the first unanimous winner in the award's 43-year history.

France international Wembanyama, a generational talent who has helped transform San Antonio into title contenders, earned a perfect 100 votes in the media ballot.

Oklahoma City's Chet Holmgren came in second in the voting, with Detroit's Ausar Thompson ranked third.

The win marked another milestone in the meteoric rise of Wembanyama, who at 22 is the youngest player in history to win the honour.

"I'm super, super happy to win this award and actually super proud to be the first-ever unanimous," Wembanyama told NBC Sports Network following the award.

The 7ft 4in (2.24m) Frenchman has been billed as the future face of the NBA ever since he landed in the league after being chosen by San Antonio with the top overall pick in the 2023 Draft.

Mixing prodigious defence with a potent offense, Wembanyama has excelled again this season and is regarded as one of the front-runners for the NBA's Most Valuable Player award.

Wembanyama led the league in blocks per game (3.08) for a third straight season and helped lead the Spurs to the No.3 ranking in defensive ratings.

On Sunday, Wembanyama lit up the playoffs in his first postseason game, scoring 35 points to go with five rebounds and two blocks as San Antonio defeated the Portland Trail Blazers.

German basketball legend Dirk Nowitzki told AFP in an interview

on Monday ahead of his induction to the FIBA Hall of Fame that Wembanyama was "changing the game as we speak."

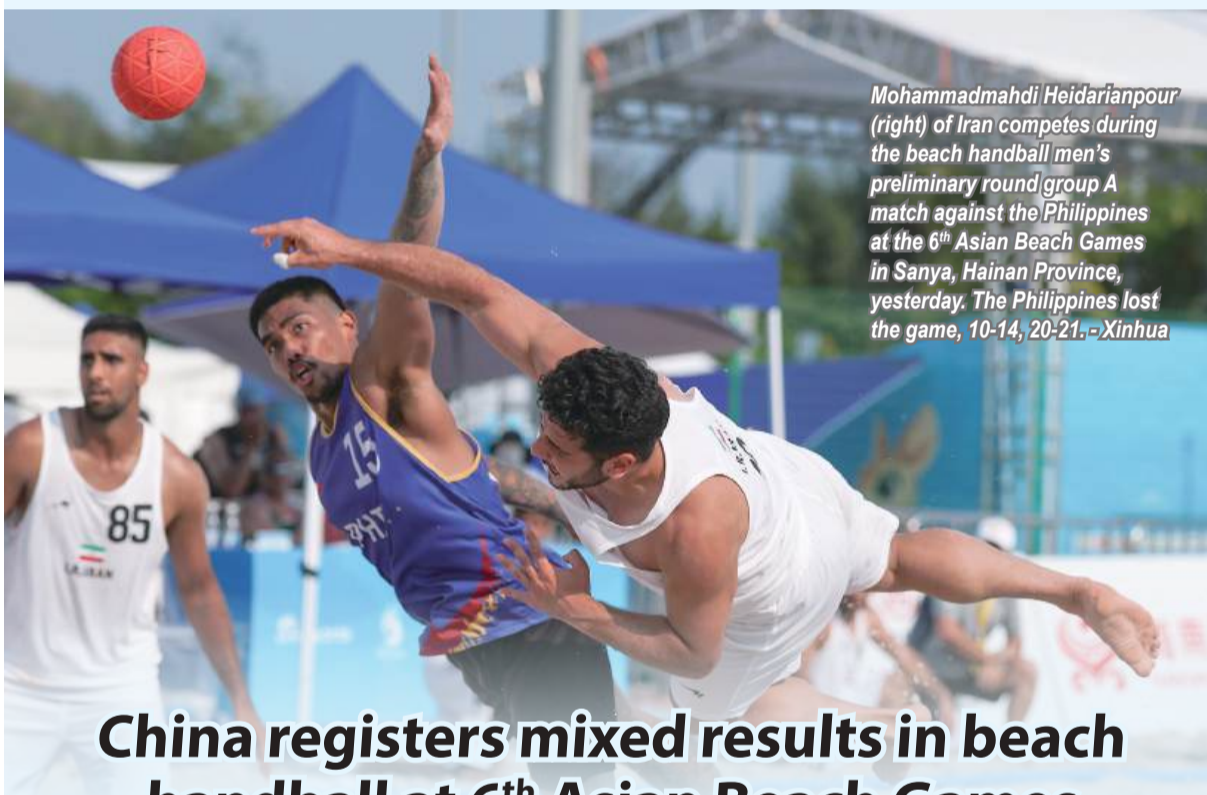
"I've never seen anything like it," the 2007 NBA MVP told AFP when asked about Wembanyama.

"His defence is so good that he changes the game just by being on the court and taking away some of the layups and twos that other teams would usually take."

Wembanyama insisted on Monday that he owed his success to the work of his teammates and the Spurs coaching staff.

"We often overlook the team aspect," Wembanyama said.

"I'm sitting here. I happen to be the guy who's put in the spotlight, but I am part of a system, and I couldn't get this award, and I couldn't do what I do if it wasn't for my teammates ... and my coaching staff." – AFP



Mohammadmahdi Heidarianpour (right) of Iran competes during the beach handball men's preliminary round group A match against the Philippines at the 6th Asian Beach Games in Sanya, Hainan Province, yesterday. The Philippines lost the game, 10-14, 20-21. -Xinhua

China registers mixed results in beach handball at 6th Asian Beach Games



SANYA – Competition at the 6th Asian Beach Games officially began yesterday in Sanya, a coastal city in Hainan Province as host China posted one win and one loss on the opening day of the men's beach handball tournament.

China faced a tough challenge in its Group A opener against Bahrain. After losing the first set 14-8, the Chinese squad mounted a comeback in the second and

held a clear lead for much of the set. However, Bahrain rallied in the closing moments to force a shootout and eventually claimed the set 15-14 for the victory.

"We didn't play to our potential," Chinese player Ma Huifeng told reporters after the match. "We need to make adjustments and focus on the upcoming games."

China bounced back in the evening session with a 2-0 victory

over Sri Lanka in its second group match.

The group stage continues tomorrow, when the Chinese women's team is scheduled to make its debut.

The Asian Beach Games will officially open today and run through April 30, featuring nearly 1,800 athletes from 45 members of the Olympic Council of Asia competing for 62 gold medals across 14 sports. – Xinhua

F1 makes rule changes after drivers' criticism

F1

PARIS – Formula One chiefs unanimously agreed on Monday to make rule changes following severe criticism of new regulations introduced this season which led to doubts over Max Verstappen continuing in the sport.

The new rules made cars a combination of combustion and electrical power, meaning drivers had to carefully manage their battery, effectively slowing down on a qualifying lap, while the cars had boost buttons to allow them to overtake.

Four-time world champion Verstappen called the new style of racing "a joke" after the Chinese Grand Prix and hinted he would take a break from F1 in 2027 unless changes were made.

Other drivers had criticised the new rules and fans said the changes had detracted from the experience of spectators.

Following an online meeting between F1, its governing body FIA, and the sport's team principals, tweaks to the rules have been finalised and are set to come in for the Miami Grand Prix on May 3.

That race will end the season's enforced five-week break following the cancellation of the Bahrain and Saudi Arabia races due to the conflict in the Middle East.

Among the changes, energy harvesting - which helps the driver charge the battery - will be reduced from eight megajoules to seven and the hybrid power unit will be increased from 250kw to 350kw.

The changes are designed to allow the drivers to go at full speed for longer in qualifying.

Another change has been made to the boost button, after British driver Ollie Bearman's high-speed crash at the last round in Japan, which was attributed partly to the difference in closing speeds.

The boost button will now be capped at 150kw, "limiting sudden performance differentials", the FIA said in a statement.

Further talks are set to take place after the Miami Grand Prix.

Mercedes team principal Toto Wolff cautioned against sweeping changes to the rulebook, after his drivers Kimi Antonelli and George Russell made a fast start to the season. Antonelli leads Russell by nine points in the standings after the first three races.

Speaking before the meeting, Wolff said: "The discussions that have been taking place between the drivers, the FIA, Formula One, and the teams have been constructive. And we all share the same objectives.

"It's how can we improve the product, make it out-and-out racing, and look at what can improve in terms of safety, but act with a scalpel and not with a baseball bat.

"We are going to ratify, in order to evolve, because there have only been three races. We need to learn from the past, where decisions were sometimes made in an erratic way, and then we overshot and realised it wasn't good.

"We are custodians of the sport and we have many hundreds of thousands of fans that love F1. In order to protect this huge opportunity that the sport gives us, we shouldn't badmouth in public our own sport." – AFP



Belarus' tennis player Aryna Sabalenka poses with her Best Sportswoman Award during the 27th Laureus World Sports Awards gala in Madrid on Monday. – AFP

Sinner wants to use Madrid to boost career Grand Slam chances

Tennis

MADRID – World number one Jannik Sinner said yesterday his principal aim as he prepares for the Madrid Open is to be in the "best possible shape" for Roland Garros next month as he seeks to complete a career Grand Slam.

The 24-year-old won his first major title on clay earlier this month as he downed rival Carlos Alcaraz

in straight sets in the Monte Carlo Masters final.

Next he turns his attentions to the 1000-level event in Madrid as the clay-court season ramps up towards the only Grand Slam tournament Sinner has not yet won - Roland Garros, which will run from May 24 to June 7.

"I never played very well here, so let's see how it goes this year," Sinner, who has never got past the quarter-final stage in the Spanish

capital, told reporters the day before the Madrid Open begins.

"I'm trying to improve as a player and here might be one of the most challenging ones because of certain things (altitude and wind)."

Despite being heavily favoured to pick up a fifth consecutive Masters title, Sinner revealed that for him "the most important is Roland Garros".

"We try to maximise to be in the best possible shape there, but I'm

here trying to do my best and then we'll see how it goes," he added.

Sinner lost an all-time classic Roland Garros final last year to Alcaraz, despite holding three championship points.

But the Italian said he regretted the upcoming absences of the world number two, due to Alcaraz suffering a wrist injury, and 24-time Grand Slam champion Novak Djokovic in Madrid.

"It's a very big pity to not have (Alcaraz) here and also Novak, the two biggest stars in tennis," Sinner said.

"We have shared since last year a lot of tournaments, but again, in my mind I also know if I want to play against Carlos it's in the final and the way to the final is very long."

Top seed Sinner will start his Madrid Open campaign in the second round against a yet to be determined opponent. – AFP

Michael Jackson fans pack Hollywood for biopic premiere

Paula Ramon

HOLLYWOOD – Hollywood was clad in black and glittering sequins on Monday to host the Los Angeles premiere of Michael Jackson’s biopic, drawing fans of the King of Pop to the iconic California boulevard.

The film “Michael” chronicles the legendary artist’s rise from a child star to one of the world’s most famous pop icons, and arrives 16 years after his death.

It was initially released in Europe and will hit US cinemas on Friday.

“It’s beautiful to see all these people here to support Michael Jackson and support the movie, and to show love for Michael,” the film’s director Antoine Fuqua told AFP.

Its premiere in Los Angeles – the adopted home of the “Billie Jean” performer – also became a family affair, led by the film’s star and icon’s nephew Jaafar Jackson.

“[This] being the first time that I’ve ever got into acting and to be able to portray my Uncle Michael, it’s so surreal,” Jaafar told AFP.

“I’m still taking it in and not really realising how much it’s going to hit me or when it’s going to hit me. But, you know, it’s incredible,” he added.

Jaafar’s performance won praise from his uncles, who highlighted the acting newcomer’s “wonderful job” in portraying a figure they knew with an intimacy few others shared.

“When I watch the movie, I think I’m watching Michael on the stage... He did such a wonderful

job. [It] brings tears to my eyes,” Michael’s brother, Jackie Jackson, said on the black carpet.

Marlon Jackson – another member of the Jackson 5, the youth group where Michael got his start as an artist – reflected on how the film might offer a window into the famous family’s home life.

“I think people understand and realise that the Jackson family is no different than any family. We go through our trials and tribulations, ups and downs, but we learn to agree to disagree,” he said.

Family affair

Marlon, Jackie, Jaafar and La Toya Jackson – one of Michael’s sisters – shared embraces on the black carpet, where they met the actors who portrayed them and their parents in the film.

Nia Long, who stepped into the shoes of Katherine – Michael’s mother and close ally – remarked that, in a male-dominated world, the women of the clan “set the baseline for how the family moved.”

The actress hopes the film will allow audiences to view Michael Jackson as “an artist who was a master of his artistry” and someone who “cared deeply about humanity.”

As for Colman Domingo, who portrays Michael’s strict father Joe Jackson: “Everyone has a story, and everyone has something you can learn from – just like a great album.”

“Hopefully this film is a great album for someone, and if they could take something from it, then we did our job.” – AFP



US singer La Toya Jackson waves upon arrival for the Los Angeles premiere of Lionsgate’s “Michael” at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, California on Monday. – AFP

Romanian AI music sensation Lolita sparks racism debate

Ani Sandu

BUCHAREST – The sultry songs of Lolita Cercel, an AI-generated singer, are a sensation in Romania, racking up millions of views online – but angering real-life musicians and drawing criticism from the Roma minority as a racist cliché.

Since debuting late last year, “Lolita” has given TV interviews, landed representation by a top booking agency and had a cabinet member use the digitally generated singer’s telegenic image to promote his ministry’s projects.

But the videos’ popularity has stirred debate in Romania about artificial intelligence (AI) replacing humans, and has raised questions about ethnic stereotypes in a country with a history of discriminating against the Roma.

Lolita is “a very sexualised” character, “a non-Roma man’s fantasy of what a Roma woman might look like”, Bogdan Burdusel, a 35-year-old Roma activist, told AFP, criticising “latent and unaddressed racism” in Romanian society.

Real-life Roma singer Bianca Mihai, a contestant on the Romanian version of reality TV show “The Voice” last year, called Lolita’s overnight success “unfair”.

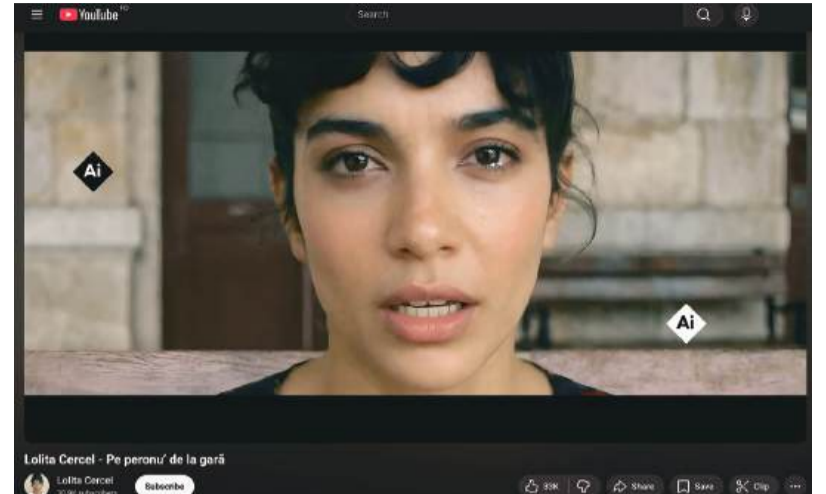
“I’m trying to build a career right now, and I feel like there’s no room for me,” said Mihai, 25, who juggles a full-time job as an IT consultant with studio rehearsals and an acting gig.

In reality, Lolita is the work of a man who calls himself Tom, a 32-year-old visual designer who said he did not necessarily mean for his creation to have a Roma identity.

Tom, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Lolita “doesn’t necessarily belong to a specific culture”.

“She reflects the reality of millions of people living in the Balkans. She embodies a Balkan identity more than a Romani one,” he told AFP.

Tom, who has described his project as “a fusion of Balkan nostalgia and the synthetic future”, said he chose folk music traditionally played by Roma for Lolita’s songs because it “speaks the truth most bluntly” and represents “a kind of blues of our own”.



This is a screen grab of a video showing AI generated singer Lolita, pictured in Bucharest, Romania, last Thursday. – AFP

‘Didn’t mean to offend’

“I didn’t mean to offend anyone,” he said, seeming shy and uncomfortable with the media attention the project has generated.

Tom said he wrote the lyrics for Lolita’s songs – about “love and everyday struggles” – and used prompts to produce the music and videos with AI, not expecting it “to go so viral”.

In public comments, he has praised AI for “democratising” musical creation.

AI-generated tracks regularly go viral, and global music industry body IFPI has called on the sector to ensure AI-generated content compensates musicians.

AI is “really good” at focusing in on people’s music consumption, mimicking what the industry usually offers, said Grigore Burloiu, a lecturer in interactive technologies at the National University of Theatre and Film in Bucharest.

“No one woke up overnight and said: ‘That’s it, I like AI’... AI is all about finding the lowest common denominator,” he told AFP.

‘That hurts’

In one of Tom’s most-viewed songs, a teary-eyed Lolita, wearing a red flower dress and hoop earrings, stares into the camera on a train platform.

The avatar calls herself “a cast-out gypsy”, asking her married lover if she’s not worth a dime compared to his “proper fine lady” who has

“furs and money”.

“She’s exactly the kind of girl we find very easy to accept and exoticise,” said real-life singer Mihai.

In general, Lolita’s lyrics are “the most clichéd things”, added Mihai, saying people tell her “all the time” she looks like the AI-generated singer.

“It’s nice to borrow elements from Romani culture, but we don’t necessarily like the Romani people. And that hurts,” Mihai told AFP.

Enslaved from the 14th to the 19th century, Roma were legally treated as property in a swath of Europe spanning what is now Romania and Moldova.

Mihai herself only began to publicly identify as Roma when she was around 18 years old, after her parents – fearing she would face discrimination – encouraged her not to reveal it.

While participating in “The Voice”, Mihai was the target of anti-Roma hate speech, even receiving death threats on social networks.

Meanwhile, praise abounds on Lolita’s channels, with one user calling her Romania’s Amy Winehouse.

“Now I understand why people fall in love with AI,” wrote another. Mihai is watching uneasily.

“Lolita released five songs in a month and got a tonne of views,” she said, calculating that it would take her months to do that.

“We can’t really compare. It’s very hard.” – AFP

‘Super Mario Galaxy’ rules N American box office for 3rd week

LOS ANGELES – “The Super Mario Galaxy Movie” – based on Nintendo’s popular video game franchise – topped North America’s box office for the third week in a row, industry estimates showed on Sunday.

The animated sequel from Universal and Illumination Studios tracking the adventures of Mario, Luigi and friends in outer space raked in another US\$35 million, Exhibitor Relations reported.

That puts the worldwide box office total of the film – which features the voices of Jack Black, Chris Pratt, Anya Taylor-Joy and Brie Larson – at nearly US\$750 million.

Holding its own in second

place is another space adventure, Amazon MGM’s smash hit “Project Hail Mary,” which earned US\$20.4 million over the weekend in the United States and Canada.

The film, which stars Ryan Gosling as a teacher-turned-astronaut who awakes on a spaceship with a mission to save Earth from a dimming sun, has earned more than US\$570 million worldwide, and its run in cinemas has been extended.

“‘Super Mario’ and ‘Project Hail Mary’ continue to drive the business in their third and fifth weekends – they’re carrying the box office,” said analyst David A. Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research.

Debuting in third place is “Lee Cronin’s The Mummy,” an original horror flick from Warner Bros, which earned US\$13.5 million. The film is not related to Universal’s adventure films starring Brendan Fraser.

In the fourth spot at US\$4.8 million was “The Drama,” A24’s romantic comedy with a dark twist starring Zendaya and Robert Pattinson about a couple unravelling just before their wedding.

And finishing in fifth at US\$3.8 million was another rom com, Universal’s “You, Me & Tuscan” starring actress-singer Halle Bailey and Rege-Jean Page of “Bridgerton” fame. – AFP

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 11°C~24°C	Manila 23°C~35°C	New York 8°C~14°C	Lisbon 12°C~21°C
Shanghai 13°C~20°C	Bangkok 27°C~36°C	London 7°C~17°C	Rio de Janeiro 18°C~26°C
Hong Kong 23°C~29°C	Tokyo 15°C~23°C	Frankfurt 4°C~18°C	Luanda 25°C~29°C
Taipei 22°C~30°C	Singapore 25°C~33°C	Vancouver 9°C~15°C	Maputo 19°C~26°C
Guangzhou 21°C~30°C	Kuala Lumpur 25°C~34°C	Paris 7°C~19°C	Dili 24°C~31°C
Nanjing 11°C~15°C	Jakarta 24°C~33°C	Moscow 4°C~13°C	São Tomé 25°C~33°C
Guilin 12°C~19°C	Seoul 9°C~20°C	Las Vegas 12°C~24°C	Praia 19°C~27°C
Xi’an 7°C~20°C	Sydney 15°C~22°C	Monte Carlo 14°C~18°C	Bissau 20°C~37°C



Fruity chairs

A woman visits the Bull&Stein stand at the Salone del Mobile Milano, International Furnishing and Design Fair, taking place at the Fiera Milano venue, in Rho on the outskirts of Milan, northern Italy, yesterday. – AFP



Butterflies in stomach

People walk past sculptures entitled "The Three Brains of the Human Body" by Andrea Olivari as part of the Fuorisalone 2026 event, during the Milan Design Week, in Milan, yesterday. – AFP



Lampshades galore

A street vendor pushes her fruit stall as she walks past a lamp shop in Hanoi yesterday. – AFP



Travelling far?

A man tries VR equipment at the exhibition area of Siemens at Hannover Messe 2026 in Hannover, Germany, on Monday.

Hannover Messe 2026, Germany's flagship industrial trade fair, opened on Monday with industrial artificial intelligence (AI) and humanoid robots taking center stage for the first time. – Xinhua



Staying right here

An armed police officer stands next to the ancient Cotofenesti helmet and two Dacian gold bracelets on display at the National Museum of History of Romania (MNIR) in Bucharest yesterday. The artefacts, shown together for the first time since their repatriation, are part of a national campaign to bring Romania's most significant ancient treasures to the public across the country. In January 2025, the Cotofenesti helmet and several gold bracelets were stolen from the Drents Museum in Assen, Netherlands. They were on loan from the National Museum of History of Romania (MNIR) as part of the "Dacia – Empire of Gold and Silver" exhibition. – AFP



Symbol of feminine power

A girl revered as living goddess 'Kumari' looks on during the first day of the Rato Machindranath Jatra festival in Lalitpur, Nepal yesterday. – AFP