

# Sam, Spanish foreign minister vow sustained cooperation

Tony Wong

Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai, who was on the second day of his working visit to Spain, met with Minister for Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation José Manuel Albares Bueno in Madrid yesterday morning (local time), aiming to lay a solid foundation for enhancing future exchanges and cooperation between Macau and Spain in areas such as trade and investment, culture, and sci-tech innovation, according to a statement released by the Macau Government Information Bureau (GCS) last night (Macau time).

Both sides agreed to maintain dialogue and advance mutual collaboration, the statement said.

Sam arrived Madrid on Tuesday evening (local time) after his four-day working visit to Lisbon, the Portuguese capital.

During the meeting, according to the statement, Sam noted that in recent years, China and Spain have had frequent high-level exchanges, with Spain's King Felipe VI and Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez both having visited China, reflecting the deepening and substantive progress of the China-Spain comprehensive strategic partnership.

Sam said that as a special administrative region of China, Macau has, since its return to the motherland, undertaken external engagement responsibilities. Leveraging the strengths of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle, Sam said, Macau has continued to play a unique role as a platform for cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking countries, including the successful hosting of multiple Ministerial Conferences of the Forum for Economic and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking



Macau Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai (right) shakes hands with Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation José Manuel Albares Bueno on the sidelines of their meeting in Madrid yesterday morning (local time). - Photo: GCS

Countries (Macao), known as Forum Macao for short, as well as last year's Conference of the Forum of Presidents of the Supreme Courts of Portuguese-speaking Countries and Territories. Through a series of international events, Sam said, Macau has effectively supported China's external cooperation.

According to the statement, Sam noted that President Xi Jinping and the central

government have clearly expressed support for Macau to become an important bridgehead for China's opening-up. The ongoing visit by the MSAR delegation to Spain, comprising officials and business representatives, is a key step in fulfilling the central authorities' requirement for Macau to expand its international engagement, Sam said.

Sam underlined that Macau is eager to take

Spain as a starting point to extend Macau's role as a China-Portuguese-speaking countries' platform into the Spanish-speaking world, which involves expanding practical cooperation with Spain in trade, cultural tourism, and sci-tech innovation, while jointly promoting deeper and mutually beneficial cooperation between China and other Spanish-speaking countries.

Continued on p.5

## US doesn't dictate terms of trade talks: Carney

MONTREAL – The United States does not get to dictate the terms of upcoming trade talks, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said yesterday, when asked about reports that Washington wanted an "entry fee" before starting negotiations.

The United States and Canada are set to hold talks on revising a North American free trade agreement (FTA), a pact President Donald Trump signed and praised during his first term but now dismisses as "irrelevant."

Quoting multiple Canadian sources,

Canada's public broadcaster CBC reported yesterday that Trump's team wants an "entry fee," or concessions, from Canada before starting talks on revising the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA).

Prominent Canadian politician and former Quebec premier Jean Charest, now a member of Carney's advisory council on US trade, told French public broadcaster Radio-Canada that Trump is demanding "concessions before we sit down at the table."

Asked about those reports in Ottawa,

and whether Canada should offer concessions in order to persuade the US to talk, Carney said "no."

"It's not a case of the US dictating the terms...It's not a case of [one country] demanding and the other begging," he said in French. "It's a negotiation."

The offices of US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick and US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer did not immediately reply to requests for comment on the CBC's report.

Since taking office just over one year

ago, Carney has maintained a defiant tone in response to Trump's threats, insisting Canada will not buckle when faced with unreasonable trade demands.

He has also said Canada needs to dramatically reduce its economic and security reliance on the United States.

Trump has imposed punishing tariffs on key Canadian sectors but has so far adhered to most of the USMCA, meaning more than 85 percent of US-Canada trade has remained tariff-free.

-AFP

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

The Macau Post Daily

China, Cambodia hold 1<sup>st</sup> meeting between foreign, defense ministers under '2+2' strategic dialogue mechanism

- Story on p. 7

New drugs raise hopes of pancreatic cancer breakthrough

After decades of struggling to find a way to treat pancreatic cancer, researchers have developed several promising new drugs that could offer rare hope to patients given this particularly deadly diagnosis.

- Story on p. 10

Michelle Bachelet hopes world is ready for female UN chief

Former Chilean president Michelle Bachelet, a candidate for UN secretary-general, said on Tuesday she hoped the world is finally "ready" for a woman in the position.

- Story on p. 12

# Sports Bureau to host inclusive sports day Sunday



Sports Bureau's (ID) Sports Development Department Chief Chao Kuok Wai speaks to reporters after yesterday's "Dynamic Community - 2026 Sports Day for People with Disabilities" press conference at the bureau's headquarters in Zape.

- Photo: Khalel Vallo

Khalel Vallo

"Dynamic Community - 2026 Sports Day for People with Disabilities" will take place this Sunday, featuring competitions and interactive activities aimed at promoting inclusion and encouraging lifelong participation in sports, the Sports Bureau announced in a press conference at its headquarters in Zape yesterday.

Organised by the bureau, and co-organised by the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS), Macau-China Paralympic Committee & Macau-China Recreation and Sports Association for the Disabled, Macau Special Olympics and the Macau Sports Association of the Deaf, the event will be held in two parts.

A table tennis competition for people with a disability will take place from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. at Mong-Ha Sports Centre in Areia Preta district, while recreational activities will run from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. in Praça dos Lótus in Ilha Verde district.

The afternoon session, in Ilha Verde district, will feature booths designed for participants of different abilities, alongside experiences such as a Drunken Dragon Dance, fitness assessments, and sports demonstrations, while interactive simulation activities - including wheelchair badminton and table tennis, as well as guided running experiences for the visually impaired - will allow participants without disabilities to better understand the challenges faced by people with a disability in daily life and sport, according to the press conference.

Speaking to the media after the press conference, ID Sports Development Department Chief

Chao Kuok Wai said he was pleased to attend the annual event again and highlighted its growing impact on the community. "I am very happy to be invited to attend this event again. I am also glad to work together with the Social Welfare Bureau and the three local organisations. We hope that through greater participation, we can strengthen our community and enable more people with a disability to take part in activities", he said.

Chao added that the table tennis competition was introduced this year in response to participants' interests. "We understand that some people with a disability are particularly interested in sports like table tennis, and they often practise it. So, this year, we organised a dedicated competition", he said.

Referring to the recreational segment, Chao noted that the organisers were building on last years' experience. "For the afternoon activities, we achieved good results with an open venue last year, so we are continuing with that approach. With the support of the Social Welfare Bureau, we hope to attract even more participants this year", he added. The event welcomes the participation of young table-tennis and badminton players, "and is open to everyone who wants to participate, enjoy the pleasure of sport and contribute to an inclusive society".

According to the press conference, the event aims to provide more opportunities for people with disabilities (PWDs) to engage in sport, fostering healthy lifestyles while promoting the message of "sport for all" and building a more inclusive community in Macau. ■

# Health & education bureaux train teachers to advance healthy campus initiative

Khalel Vallo

The Health Bureau (SSM) and Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) have jointly conducted a health promotion training course for teachers, aiming to embed health concepts across campuses and strengthen students' physical and mental well-being, according to an SSM statement on Tuesday.

The course forms a part of a broader push to align with the "Action Plan for a Healthy Macau" and the local government's policy directions of early intervention, resource allocation, and mindset transformation, the statement said.

Through cross-department collaboration and community engagement, the local authorities continue to expand the "healthy community" initiative, with schools identified as key platforms for cultivating health awareness among young people, the statement noted.

Running from this month to November, the programme includes eight sessions, with the first conducted last Saturday, the statement added.

According to the statement, the sessions adopt a small-class interactive format, incorporating scenario simulations, group discussions, and practical exercises, in which topics cover a wide range of health-related areas, including smoking and alcohol reduction, a balanced diet, regular exercise, sleep habits, mental health, disease screening, chronic illness management, and vaccination.

The statement underlined that participants also receive hands-on training in measuring key health indicators such as blood pressure, blood glucose, waist circumference, and body mass index (BMI). Upon completion, teachers are expected to integrate these health aspects into daily teaching and campus activities, helping students develop self-management skills and healthier lifestyles.

Meanwhile, the statement said that teachers play a vital role in shaping students' habits and attitudes. Building on previous collaboration with the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) in community health promotion training, this year's programme focuses specifically on schools, the statement noted, adding that teachers who complete the training may organise health-themed activities and workshops, extending health awareness to students and parents while strengthening the overall "healthy campus" culture.

In order to further translate training outcomes into action, the statement outlined eight key healthy behaviours for children and adolescents, namely avoiding tobacco and alcohol, maintaining a balanced diet, engaging in at least one hour of daily physical activity, ensuring sufficient sleep, nurturing mental well-being, participating in regular health screenings, managing chronic conditions, and keeping up with recommended vaccinations.

The Health Bureau said it will continue working with the city's



This unlocated handout photo provided by the Health Bureau (SSM) on Tuesday shows teachers learning how to measure glucose using their fingertips and to understand the importance of monitoring glucose levels, during their health promotion training course last Saturday.

education sector and civil society to advance the "healthy campus" initiative, positioning teachers as promoters of health and enabling students and families to adopt proactive health management practices, in line with the vision of building a "healthy and happy Macau", the statement noted. ■

# Shop faces fine for selling 'cigar egg rolls': Health Bureau

Armindo Neves

The Health Bureau (SSM) announced in a statement yesterday that a local shop faces a fine for selling "cigar egg rolls".

According to the statement, during recent inspections, the bureau's tobacco and alcohol control officials discovered that the shop was selling cigar-shaped egg rolls with the word "cigar" as part of the product's name.

According to Article 18 of the Macau Tobacco Prevention and Control Law, the manufacturing and sale of games, toys, electronic games, food or sweets in the shape of tobacco products, or with distinctive signs of tobacco brands, is prohibited.

The bureau noted in the statement that the shop may be subject to a fine ranging from 20,000 to 200,000 patacas.

Meanwhile, the bureau's tobacco and alcohol control officers conducted 65,548 inspections of business premises between January and March, averaging 728 inspections per day, during which 1,524 cases were violations of the Tobacco Prevention and Control Law, such as 1,459 cases of smoking in no-smoking areas, 43 cases of carrying e-cigarettes



This undated handout photo provided by the Health Bureau (SSM) yesterday shows a tobacco and alcohol control official and a Macau Customs Service officer inspecting a shop.

across border checkpoints, and 22 cases suspected of violating other provisions of the law, such as failure to display no-smoking signs in locations as required by law, and failure to post notices prohibiting the sale of tobacco products to individuals under 18 years of age at points of sale.

Additionally, two violations of the Alcohol Consumption Control Law were recorded, the statement said, such as businesses selling or serving alcoholic beverages that failed to display the required warning labels in Chinese, Portuguese, and English

when advertising alcoholic drinks; failing to post legally required signs prohibiting the sale or provision of alcohol to minors; and self-service outlets failing to demarcate and clearly label separate areas for alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages.

The statement also noted that the types of businesses with the highest number of smoking in no-smoking areas cases were casinos - 254 cases, accounting for 17.4 percent of the total; restaurants, 245 cases, accounting for 16.8 percent; and public bus stops, 192 cases, accounting for 13.2 percent. ■

## Published since Aug 2004

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

## Macau Weather

**MAINLY CLOUDY. SHOWERS, HEAVY LATER. A FEW THUNDERSTORMS LATER. FORCE 3 TO 4 SOUTHWESTERLY WINDS, BECOMING NORTHERLIES WITH GUSTS. RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 80% AND 99%.**



21°C~27°C

Source: SMG

# Free 'Tourism & Leisure Bus' programme to start Saturday

Armando Neves

The Macau government, in collaboration with the city's six integrated resort operators, announced yesterday that they have launched a "Tourism and Leisure Bus" programme, which will begin trial operations on Saturday.

The city's six integrated resort operators are MGM, Galaxy, Sands, Melco, Wynn, and SJM Resorts.

The press conference was co-hosted by the Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSEDT), the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO), the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ), the Transport Bureau (DSAT), the Public Security Police (PSP), and the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM).

According to a statement released during the press conference in Hong Kung Temple Square, the programme aims to promote community economic development (CED) and help small-and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in local communities attract more tourists and customers.

The statement also said that the programme features three themes, six routes and nine drop-off points, involving over 1,000 businesses along the way.

The three themed routes comprise "Holiday Vibes Macau," running during the Labour Day holiday, between April 29 and May 5, passing through Zape and Rua dos Ervanários; "Taste The Streets Macau," running at weekends, connecting the northern district, San Kiu district, Patane Market and Hong Kung Night Market; and "Leisurely Weekend Macau," taking place in Barra district and Nam Van Lake Anim'Arte NAM VAN.

The statement also said that a mobile information webpage set up by DSEDT, features approximately 300 special businesses, including centuries-old shops and other "distinctive" stores.

The Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau emphasised in the statement that no gambling-related content may be displayed on any of the buses, while the Public Security Police (PSP) will maintain traffic order in all districts and have established an emergency response coordination mechanism to optimise the traffic environment at the bus stops.

DICJ Research and Information Analysis Division Chief So Wing Young said during the press conference that depending on the community environment, the bureau will deploy both 45-seat buses and 24-seat buses, with up to around 40 trips per day, which will be free of charge.

The press conference did not reveal how many buses will be deployed by the programme.

Macau Central and Southern Districts Industrial and Commercial Federation Chairman Lei Cheok Kuan told reporters after the press conference that the programme may help channel the city's "high-quality customer base" from the integrated resort enterprises into residential communities. Additionally, he called on local businesses to seize the opportunity to improve their services and product quality. Lei also expressed hope that the government will pay attention to the pressure on small businesses caused by rising oil prices.

According to a pamphlet released during the press conference, the nine bus stops will be set up in Iao Hon, Rotunda de Carlos

The pamphlets provide detailed information about the bus routes, including stop names, departure times, and contact information. They are designed to be user-friendly for both Chinese and English speakers.



This copy of a free pamphlet downloaded yesterday provides information on the programme's bus schedules and route details. - Photo: GCS

This photo taken yesterday shows one of the "Tourism and Leisure Bus" programme's 24-seat buses parked outside Hong Kung Temple Square. - Photo: Armando Neves

da Maia (colloquially known as "Three Lamps"), the sitting-out area facing Nape's Kun Iam Statue, in front of the Macau Grand Prix Museum, in Barra, at Anim'Arte NAM VAN, in front of Patane Food Court, and outside Hong Kung Temple.

There are two bilingual versions of the

free pamphlet - one in simplified Chinese characters and English, the other in traditional Chinese characters and Portuguese.

Those looking for more detailed information about the programme may visit the link: <https://www.gcs.gov.mo/news/detail/pt/N26DVB11ej>

## Macao Just Read | National Reading Campaign Week

**2026 4.20-4.26**

10-minute read, stay calm and fit

Free Admission

澳門公共圖書館 澳門文化局 IC www.library.gov.mo

<b>4.23</b>	Opening Ceremony	Macao Cultural Centre Plaza
<b>4.25-4.26</b>	10:00 - 19:00	Macao Cultural Centre and Plaza

Experience of "10 Minutes Reading"	Book Exchange	Magazine Sales
Game Booths for Family	Outdoor and Interior Reading Zones	Reading Activities for Family
Exhibitions and Workshops	Cultural Performances	and many more...

ORGANISERS: 文化局 INSTITUTO CULTURAL

SUPPORTED BY: 橫琴民生事務局 Livelihood Affairs Bureau of Hengqin, 澳門科學館 MACAO SCIENCE CENTRE, 澳門樂團有限公司 Sociedade Orquestra de Macau, Limitada Macao Orchestra Company, Limited, 澳門中華總商會, 澳門婦女聯合總會, 澳門明愛 CARITAS MACAU

# Intimate, witty & full-voiced: Macau Experimental Theatre's Gianni Schicchi triumphs

Review by William Chan

The Macau Experimental Theatre's Gianni Schicchi – Giacomo Puccini's only comic opera – performed last weekend (April 18-19), was astounding.

The opera\* is a one-act show lasting merely an hour, which is not only ideal for the Black Box Theatre at the Macau Cultural Centre (CCM), where audiences are comfortable with a more direct, single-sitting experience, but also well-suited to the preferences of contemporary viewers. This makes it one of the best classical operas to be adapted for modern times.

The overall performance was very fluent, though the first few sections felt weaker due to the need to introduce the story quickly. The side performers arguably varied in their singing skills, and the staging appeared a bit chaotic. However, Gianni Schicchi has some degree of intentional chaos written into the ensemble scenes, so the production choices were not unfaithful to the opera. The plot itself became well understood by the end.

The opera was performed in Italian, its original language. Instead of an orchestra, a piano was used due to production constraints. The pianist managed to hold everything together, but the acoustic songs lacked the comedic feel of a full orchestration – especially from the wind sections – an understandable trade-off.

Then the performance's main character, Gianni Schicchi, stormed onto the stage. Played by Hong Kong baritone Michael Lam Chun Ting, he was perfectly cast – very comedic in his acting, but also a true testament to how a singer's voice can convey a character's personality in an instant. Lam immediately captivated the entire audience. The initial sections, carried by witty direction and good stage settings, set the comedic tone. Lam, alongside local classical soprano Vivian Ng Wai Hang (who played Lauretta, Gianni Schicchi's daughter), carried the latter sections with their incredible, emotion-filled singing voices. Ng's solo "O mio babbino caro" ("Oh, my dear daddy") and Lam's playful vocal delivery – especially in "Si corre dal notaio" ("Let's run to the notary") – elevated the entire production to another level.

Lastly, credit must be given to the show's director, Johny Tam (譚智泉), whom the *Post* interviewed weeks ago\*\* when he shared the production process with us.

Gianni Schicchi was a great choice for the local audience, and it felt like a very well-crafted Hong Kong family inheritance drama that resonated with local viewers. His intimate staging in the black box theatre created a "music salon" atmosphere. Tam aimed to challenge conventional perceptions of opera, demonstrating its flexibility and relevance in a more accessible, life-like context – and he was quite successful.

Sitting in the back row of the black box theatre, I still felt the full force of the singers, something I can hardly say for the Grand Auditorium, and even the Small Auditorium, at the Macau Cultural Centre. The stage settings were also very clean and efficient.

With only two shows being held in a 160-seat venue, this puts additional constraints on the production budget. Nevertheless, it was a relief to see that both performances achieved a full house – and that a well-crafted performance, as well as an appreciative audience, still exists in Macau.

*\*In Puccini's one-act comic opera Gianni Schicchi, the wealthy Buoso Donati has just died, and his greedy relatives gather to mourn – though they are far more interested in his fortune. When they discover that Buoso's will leaves everything to a local monastery, they fall into despair. Desperate to rewrite the will, they turn to the clever, working-class Gianni Schicchi for help. After his daughter Lauretta pleads with him in the famous aria "O mio babbino caro," Schicchi agrees to impersonate the dead man. He summons a notary and dictates a new will – but outsmarts the scheming relatives by leaving the most valuable assets to himself. The relatives are left empty-handed and furious, while Schicchi, having secured his daughter's dowry and her future with her beloved Rinuccio, cheekily asks the audience for forgiveness. – DeepSeek*

\*\* [www.macaupostdaily.com/news/27947](http://www.macaupostdaily.com/news/27947)



Hong Kong baritone Michael Lam Chun Ting sings, accompanied by local pianist Sandra Poon Ho Suet at the final section of Gianni Schicchi.



Director Johny Tam (centre) speaks to the audience after Saturday's performance at the Black Box Theatre II.



Soprano Vivian Ng Wai Hang sings what is by far the most famous aria from the entire opera (and one of the most beloved soprano arias in all opera): "O mio babbino caro" ("Oh, my dear daddy").

– Photos: Bob Wong



## Sam, Spanish foreign minister vow sustained cooperation

*Continued from p.1*

According to the statement, Sam said that he expects Spain to support Macau in becoming an important platform for enhanced cooperation between China and Spanish-speaking countries across economic, cultural, and tourism fields.

According to the statement, Albares said during the meeting that the MSAR delegation's visit presented a significant opportunity to deepen friendly relations between China and Spain. He said that Sam's briefing about Macau enabled him to gain a better understanding of how Macau can serve as a vital connecting point for sustained exchanges and cooperation between China, Spain, and other Spanish-speaking countries.

Albares noted that Spain maintains close ties and frequent interactions with Portugal and Brazil, and welcomes Macau's participation in these networks to jointly explore new areas of collaboration.

Looking forward, Albares said, Spain is ready to further strengthen economic, trade, and tourism cooperation with Macau, and expects to take part in future international economic and trade events held in Macau, thereby enhancing Spain's global engagement and influence.

Albares also said that he expects an increase in the number of high-level visits and practical exchanges between Spain and Macau. Spain will also support the MSAR government in promoting the learning of the Spanish language in Macau, with a view to nurturing a greater number of Chinese-Spanish bilingual talents, the minister said.

### Sam vows deeper cooperation with UN Tourism

Meanwhile, after arriving in Madrid on Tuesday evening (local time), Sam met with the secretary-general of the United Nations World Tourism Organisation, Shaikha Al Nuwais, on Tuesday night, where they exchanged views on topics such as deepening cooperation in tourism promotion, talent development, and expansion of international visitor markets, according to a GCS statement released yesterday evening (Macau time).

The United Nations (UN) agency headquartered in the Spanish capital is known as UN Tourism for short.

During the meeting, according to the statement, Sam expressed his gratitude to UN Tourism for its long-standing support for Macau's development as a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure, as well as for fostering strong and effective cooperation mechanisms with the MSAR government.

Sam noted that since Macau became an

associate member of UN Tourism in 1981, the two sides have established a solid and pragmatic partnership.

The MSAR was established on December 20, 1999, marking Macau's return to the motherland and the end of Portugal's temporary administration of the city.

Sam underlined during the meeting that the MSAR government has consistently participated in and supported the organisation's initiatives and programmes, further strengthening Macau's engagement in international tourism cooperation.

According to the statement, Sam suggested that both sides explore broader and deeper forms of collaboration in the future, with a view to enrich Macau's role as a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure, advance sustainable tourism development, and cultivate high-calibre international tourism professionals.

During the meeting, Sam extended an invitation for Al Nuwais to lead a delegation to visit Macau for the next, 12<sup>th</sup> edition of the Global Tourism Economy Forum.

According to the statement, Al Nuwais said during the meeting that as Macau possesses a profound historical and cultural heritage, it holds significant advantages in promoting high-quality tourism development. She highlighted Macau's rich resources in tourism education, which have supported successful collaboration between UN Tourism and the Macao University of Tourism (UTM). These joint initiatives have delivered tangible results, and the two sides can further enhance their cooperation framework to elevate global standards in tourism education, she said.

Al Nuwais also noted that the Global Tourism Economy Forum, established in Macau in 2012, has become a key international platform for tourism cooperation, with its work widely recognised and highly commended. She said she expects continued and deeper engagement with the forum to jointly contribute to the sustainable development of Macau's tourism sector and the global industry.

After their meeting, Sam and Al Nuwais joined other guests at the "Macao Night" event, the closing ceremony of the "Discover Macao" Madrid Roadshow, which was jointly organised by the MSAR government and the Chinese Embassy in Spain.

Sam is scheduled to continue his four-nation European tour in Geneva today for talks with the World Trade Organisation (WTO), of which Macau is a founding member. He is slated to arrive for talks with Belgian and European Union officials tomorrow, arriving back in Macau on Sunday. ■

## Open House Macau returns to unlock city's architecture

*New book revisits 2018 event*

*Interview by Rui Pastorin*

Eight years since its first edition, the free, city-wide architecture festival "Open House Macau" is set to make its return on November 7 and 8, this time taking on the theme "Architectural Dialogues".

Open House Macau, which is part of Open House Worldwide that includes over 60 cities in six continents, was launched in 2018 and also was the first-ever Open House event in Asia. It featured tours and special activities, offering participants, with the help of volunteers, a glimpse into spaces that normally have limited access, are inaccessible or only seen from the outside.

Curated and organised by CURB – Center for Architecture and Urbanism, the buildings and spaces ranged from homes to heritage sites like the Guia Lighthouse to even a power station, with the Macau edition having proved to be a success, CURB President Nuno Soares told the *Post* at the group's headquarters at Ponte 9 last night prior to the launch of a book revisiting the 2018 event.

The previous two-day event drew over 5,500 visitors from an initial expectation of 1,500 visits, while garnering 100 volunteers, with a total of 50 buildings approved and chosen from the pre-selected 120 edifices.

While there were attempts to bring about a second edition, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic along with being demanding in terms of fees, manpower and logistics made it challenging, Soares said. This year, the event finally makes its return with the help of a grant covering half of the event's expenses, according to Soares, who noted that the preparatory work has been non-stop.

While the event philosophy remains the same, Soares said this edition will focus more on the cultural side of architecture. "We are looking into buildings' dialogues with the context, how the owners engage in dialogue with architects and how users engage in dialogue with the buildings", he said, along with dialogues between the East and West. Discussions on the knowledge exchange when designing and visiting buildings, as well as experiencing architecture, will also be found.

A percentage of the 50 buildings explored during the 2018 event will return for this edition to give people the chance to visit or revisit them, while new buildings are currently being selected, with yesterday's book event also seeing the launch of an open call for suggestions until July 19, alongside the call for volunteers.

Soares highlighted the importance of hearing from the public, noting: "We want to hear from the public and know what they are interested in. And then we'll incorporate that with our curatorship, with the group of buildings that we've already pre-selected, and knock at the owner's door asking them to open the door for us".

Different itineraries will be set up during the dates, with each building or space participating throughout the city to be marked with bright orange signs, which will either be open to walk-ins or require pre-booking. Each experience may vary, with one's Open House route or experience differing from the other.

Tours and other activities will be held, while volunteers will again be an important part of the experience, being there to introduce participants to the buildings. "Volunteers are really the soul of this event because they are the ones at every building", communicating the building's history and features, among others, Soares said.



**CURB – Center for Architecture and Urbanism President Nuno Soares poses before the start of yesterday's book launch at the group's premises at Ponte 9.**  
– Photos: Rui Pastorin

### Revisiting Open House Macau

The book "Open House Macau – Architecture Beyond Walls" launched last night meanwhile encapsulates all the research done by the CURB team for the 2018 event. "The idea of this is to share the knowledge that we have and to hopefully contribute to building up more interest about the architectural history of Macau", Soares noted, sharing that knowledge with people aside from experts, volunteers and participants.

The English-Chinese language book also aims to help researchers conduct more in-depth study, as well as for the general public to know more about the buildings they see in Macau, altogether celebrating "the architecture that we have with a bit more knowledge".

Featured are buildings from the first edition, detailing their history and purpose, among others, while also going beyond general knowledge, all accompanied by photos. "It really summarises an analysis that was done at the time to train the volunteers that were explaining the building to the visitors", Soares added, while all volunteers from the first edition are acknowledged and named in the book, highlighting their role in the event.

The buildings' exact locations are also provided on a map within the book to allow people to "discover the city and its architecture at their own pace", during or even ahead of the November event. This is part of the intended goal, with Soares pointing out that it can also act as a companion to those wanting to discover and know more about these buildings while walking around the city.

For more details, visit <https://openhousemacau.com/#get>. ■



**"Open House Macau – Architecture Beyond Walls" books are displayed at yesterday's book launch for visitors to purchase.**



**Macau Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai (right) shakes hands with UN Tourism Secretary-General Shaikha Al Nuwais on the sidelines of their meeting in Madrid on Tuesday night (local time).** – Photo: GCS

# 2-day Mosquito-borne disease prevention campaign reaches over 10,000 people

Rui Pastorin

The Health Bureau (SSM) said in a statement yesterday that the recent two-day “Community Consultation Stations for Preventing Mosquito-borne Infectious Diseases” was held across multiple parts of Macau and reached over 10,000 members of the public.

The statement noted that the event, held by its Dengue Prevention Task Force and supported by numerous organisations, saw activities including the distribution of leaflets with useful information on mosquito prevention, including the removing of standing water and prevention of mosquito bites, as well as the installation of window screens.

Parents and children also engaged in on-site learning, while residents were urged by the task force to remove standing water, eliminate mosquito breeding sources, as well as implement proper measures, among others, the statement said.

The statement warned that Macau is about to enter the peak



Residents queue at a booth set up for the recent two-day “Community Consultation Stations for Preventing Mosquito-borne Infectious Diseases”.

— Photo: Health Bureau (SSM)

season of *Aedes albopictus* activity, with the risk of transmission of dengue fever and chikungunya to significantly increase. Members of the public were reminded to remain vigilant as temperatures rise and with the approach of the Chinese mainland’s five-day Labour Day holiday, noting that the expected

increase in tourism numbers may also raise risks.

The statement gave reminders to prevent mosquito-borne diseases, including the prevention of mosquito breeding at home, the prevention of mosquitoes entering indoor spaces and the prevention of mosquito bites while outdoors. ■

# The power of reading as a bridge to knowledge, culture and development

China Daily Editorial

Regardless of whether it is via digital screens or printed pages, the act of reading remains a timeless and universal pursuit that has the ability to expand horizons, deepen understanding of the world, and foster empathy and compassion.

In China, the government promotes reading as a means to build a more educated, innovative and morally cultivated society. To facilitate the act of reading, a government regulation on promoting nationwide reading, which took effect in February, sets out measures to improve reading facilities and services, reinforcing mechanisms to support reading initiatives.

The designation of the fourth week of April as National Reading Week further underscores the government’s commitment to fostering a culture of reading. During this week, events such as lectures, bookfairs, salons and book donations are being held across the country, encouraging people to engage with books and share the joy of reading.

In an era dominated by digital screens and byte-sized information, the act of reading books stands as a testament to humanity’s enduring quest for knowledge and understanding. Reading is more than a mere intellectual exercise; it is a gateway to new ideas, a bridge between cultures, and a tool for personal and societal development.

The digital revolution has transformed the way we consume information, and reading is no exception. In China, 80.8 percent of adults now engage in digital reading through formats such as e-books,

online literature, audiobooks and video-based summaries. This has made reading more accessible and convenient, attracting individuals who might not have the time or inclination to read physical books.

Data from the fifth National Conference on Reading in China highlights a promising trend: the rapid growth of digital reading is fostering adult reading rates, which reached 82.3 percent last year, with the average number of books read per person per year climbing to 8.39.

The growth of digital reading is reflected in the numbers: by the end of 2025, China’s digital reading user base reached 689 million, up 2.95 percent from the previous year, while the total number of digital reading works exceeded 70 million. The market size of digital reading has nearly doubled over the past five years, growing to 59.48 billion yuan from 30.25 billion yuan, indicating strong growth in both supply and demand. This surge is partly due to the evolution of online literature into the broader cultural industry, with content extending into offline experiences and interactive formats.

President Xi Jinping has consistently emphasized the importance of reading as a cornerstone of personal and intellectual development.

Reading can spark intellectual insight, instill lofty ideals, and nurture a sense of moral integrity, according to an article by Xi on promoting nationwide reading and building a book-loving society. The article, published on Thursday in this year’s eighth issue of the *Qiushi Journal*, provides excerpts of Xi’s

discourses on reading from March 2013 to March 2025.

The article says people should read widely and choose good books, drawing wisdom and nourishment from them. It adds that work pressures should not be used as an excuse to neglect learning, nor should learning be reduced to a mere formality just for show.

The article also stresses that it is necessary to build a learning society where all people engage in lifelong learning, adding that Party members and officials should take the lead in reading and learning.

Digital reading should be combined with traditional reading, the article says.

Despite the rise of digital formats, there is something irreplaceable about holding a physical book, turning its pages, and experiencing the tactile joy of reading. And rather than quick consumption of digital information, printed books offer a unique opportunity for in-depth reading, a practice that is essential for personal growth, career success and moral cultivation.

Recent surveys show that 45.9 percent of adults still prefer reading printed books, especially literary works, indicating a continued demand for immersive reading that allows individuals to engage fully with ideas, reflect on their meaning and apply them to their own lives.

And as we look to a future increasingly influenced by artificial intelligence, reading takes on renewed importance as a touchstone to keep people grounded in the tangibilities of the world.

— Courtesy of China Daily

# Chinese, African experts call for deepening collaboration in infrastructure development

ADDIS ABABA – Officials and experts from China and Africa have called for further deepening China-Africa collaboration in infrastructure development, with the private sector taking a leading role in narrowing the widening infrastructure gap in Africa.

The call was made on Tuesday on the sidelines of the inaugural meeting of the China-Africa Entrepreneurs Summit at the African Union (AU) headquarters in Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital.

The gathering brought together representatives of prominent Chinese companies operating in Africa, AU officials, and Chinese and African experts on infrastructure development.

Speaking at the event, Wang Ligui, counselor of the Chinese Mission to the AU, called for enhanced strategic alignment between the AU-led Program for Infrastructure Development in Africa and China’s Belt and Road Initiative to accelerate infrastructure development on the continent.

“China and Africa need to make use of all cooperation platforms, such as the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), to support infrastructure development in Africa. African countries need to improve the business environment, offer preferential policies and increase investment protection, so as to retain Chinese enterprises that are already doing business on

the continent, and attract more,” Wang said.

Nelisiwe Sipelele Mathabela, head of the administration and facilities management division at the AU Commission, said that Africa-China cooperation in infrastructure is a cornerstone of their partnership, driving industrialization and economic growth on the continent.

Noting that China has remained a leading infrastructure partner in Africa, she said China is a primary source of funding for infrastructure construction in Africa, with major roads, railways and energy developments having been financed either through the FOCAC or its financial institutions.

Ban Yongzhi, chief representative of the Southeast Africa Office of the Export-Import Bank of China, emphasized the significance of systematic thinking, integrated planning, and an optimized financing system to build a sustainable infrastructure development environment.

“Infrastructure projects are characterized by large investments, long cycles, broad social impact, and strong spillover effects. We must take a holistic and coordinated approach when planning strategically significant infrastructure projects,” Ban said, advocating a balance of economic outcomes, social benefits, and livelihood impacts in infrastructure development. — Xinhua

主辦單位: 澳門基金會 協辦單位: 澳門書院 澳門圖書館及資訊中心 澳門中華總商會 澳門中華總商會 澳門中華總商會 澳門中華總商會 澳門中華總商會

## 連關三宴 · 潮宴

大灣區 三巴廟

時間  
TIME  
18-19/04 11:00  
25-26/04 20:00  
01-03/05 20:00

壹 文創市集  
貳 占卜水晶  
參 傳統美食  
肆 新穎打卡

# China, Cambodia hold 1<sup>st</sup> meeting between foreign, defense ministers under '2+2' strategic dialogue mechanism

PHNOM PENH – The first meeting between foreign ministers and defense ministers of China and Cambodia under the “2+2” strategic dialogue mechanism was held here in Phnom Penh, capital of Cambodia, yesterday, aiming at enhancing bilateral cooperation in various fields.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Defense Minister Dong Jun co-chaired the meeting with Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Prak Sokhonn and Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Tea Seiha.

The two sides exchanged in-depth views on bilateral relations, cooperation on political and defense security issues, and international and regional situations, reaching a broad consensus.

Wang said China is willing to work with Cambodia to develop the mechanism into a strategic platform for enhancing political and defense security cooperation, a key instrument for cementing mutual assistance and solidarity between China and Cambodia, and to make new contributions to building a China-Cambodia community with a shared future.

He noted that China supports Cambodia and Thailand in implementing the consensus reached at the China-Cambodia-Thailand Fuxian Meeting, making good use of existing bilateral mechanisms, strengthening dialogue, rebuilding mutual trust, and improving relations.



Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet (center) poses with China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi (left) and Defense Minister Dong Jun in Phnom Penh yesterday. Wang and Dong are in Cambodia for the first meeting between foreign ministers and defense ministers of China and Cambodia under the “2+2” strategic dialogue mechanism. – Xinhua

China is willing to provide platforms for more comprehensive and effective communication between Cambodia and Thailand, Wang added.

Noting that China will continue to support Cambodia in accelerating development and revitalization, and its efforts to improve

people's livelihoods, Wang said that China is willing to continue providing humanitarian support for Cambodian border residents' resettlement and other fields, and to advance poverty reduction demonstration cooperation projects.

He said China is willing to deepen

cooperation with Cambodia within the framework of the four major global initiatives proposed by China, build an Asian security model featuring shared security, seeking common ground while reserving differences, and dialogue and consultation, and promote the development of the global governance system in a more just and equitable direction.

During the meeting, Dong said China is willing to work with Cambodia to deepen and strengthen mutual trust in military security.

Meanwhile, Sokhonn said that China is Cambodia's most trusted friend and expressed his gratitude for China's comprehensive support.

He reiterated that Cambodia firmly adheres to the one-China principle and firmly supports all efforts made by China to achieve national reunification.

Seiha said that Cambodia is willing to actively explore new avenues for cooperation and promote greater development of Cambodia-China relations.

In the meeting, both sides agreed to deepen law enforcement and defense cooperation, jointly combat online gambling and telecom fraud, and safeguard their respective cybersecurity.

They also underscored supporting resolving regional disputes through dialogue and negotiation, jointly opposing unilateral bullying and power politics, and upholding global free trade and international fairness and justice. – Xinhua

## Reunification only path for Taiwan, serves well-being of Taiwan compatriots: mainland spokesperson

BEIJING – Reunification is the only path forward for Taiwan and is key to the well-being of the people on the island, a mainland spokesperson said yesterday.

Zhang Han, spokesperson for the State Council Taiwan Affairs Office, made the remarks at a press briefing in response to a recent Taiwan poll, which showed that a majority of the respondents were in favor of strengthening cross-strait exchanges to maintain peace and stability.

The poll was released following the mainland visit by a delegation of the Chinese Kuomintang (KMT) led by its chairwoman Cheng Li-wun.

The results of the poll showed that Cheng's visit to the mainland reflected the mainstream public opinion on the island, which calls for peace, development, exchanges, and cooperation, said Zhang.

Meanwhile, Zhang also responded to another media inquiry about remarks by Lai Ching-te, leader of Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), who claimed that peace cannot be achieved through compromise or concessions on “sovereignty.”

“Taiwan is part of China. It has never been and will never be a country,” Zhang said, emphasizing that the Taiwan authorities have no sovereignty over the island at all.

Maintaining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait is a common aspiration of compatriots on both sides. However, the DPP authorities run counter to the mainstream public opinion and deliberately obstruct cross-strait exchanges and cooperation. “They are the ones undermining peace and escalating tensions in the Strait,” the spokesperson said.

“Taiwan independence” is a dead end that would only bring serious harm to the Taiwan Strait, Zhang stressed, calling on more Taiwan compatriots to actively contribute to the peaceful development of cross-strait relations and the just cause of national reunification. – Xinhua

## Dangerous agenda behind Japan's move to lift ban on lethal arms exports

### Commentary

TOKYO – In another step down the dangerous path of remilitarization, the Japanese government on Tuesday officially revised the “three principles on transfer of defense equipment and technology” and their implementation guidelines to allow overseas sales of weapons, including those with lethal capabilities.

The latest decision marks more than a policy adjustment. It reflects Japan's right-wing forces' long and incremental scheme to cast off the dual constraints placed on the country by the international community and its own legal framework in the aftermath of World War II, whose erosion should alarm every nation that paid in blood for Japan's defeat.

The Potsdam Declaration explicitly requires Japan to be completely disarmed and not to maintain industries that would enable it to re-arm for war, and Tokyo later reinforced those limits through its “Three Principles on Arms Exports” in 1967, culminating in a near-total ban on arms exports in 1976.

However, the hard-won framework to ensure that Japan would not again become a source of military threat has now been overturned through years of erosion.

Tokyo has, for decades, chipped away at its own constraints – first by allowing military technology transfers to the United States, then by opening the door to joint development programs.

The 2014 changes under former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe marked a critical inflection point. By replacing

the original arms export ban with the current framework, the government effectively permitted Japan to export defense equipment and technology across five non-combat categories, signaling a fundamental shift from arms exports being “prohibited in principle” to “permitted in principle.”

Tuesday's revision completes that trajectory. By removing the remaining category restrictions and loosening controls on transfers to conflict zones, it crosses a line that previous governments had at least nominally upheld.

What makes the latest move especially alarming is that it is just part of Japan's wider push to recast the country as a “normal country” with expanded military capabilities.

Since Sanae Takaichi took office as prime minister, Japan has embarked on an accelerated path toward military buildup, steadily departing from its exclusively defense-oriented policy.

Recent risky steps – sharply increasing the defense budget, restructuring the Self-Defense Forces to enhance combat capabilities, deploying long-range missiles with so-called “counterstrike capabilities,” as well as relentless efforts to revise the Constitution, the “Three Non-Nuclear Principles” and the three security documents – all point to a deliberate departure from Japan's postwar pacifist principles and an advance toward remilitarization.

At the same time, Japan has been actively forging exclusive security blocs in the region and stoking bloc

confrontation. Weapons, in this sense, are far more than mere tools of defense; they are instruments of geopolitical leverage.

From stepping up defense equipment supplies to the Philippines to the joint naval vessels project with Australia, each arms deal tightens a web designed to encircle and contain, feeding regional tensions rather than mitigating them.

What makes the timing all the more suspicious is that the revisions coincided with the annual Spring Rites at the notorious Yasukuni Shrine, a symbol of Japanese militarism and wartime aggression.

Takaichi on Tuesday sent a ritual “masakaki” tree offering and made a monetary offering to the controversial shrine, which honors 14 convicted Class-A Japanese war criminals from World War II alongside the war dead.

A government that expands military power while its leader worships convicted war criminals is sending a clear message: Japan's neo-militarism is becoming a clear and present danger. It risks unsettling the hard-won stability of the Asia-Pacific and potentially pulling Japan itself into conflict.

That is why this moment demands vigilance. The region's peace should not be turned into a bargaining chip for geopolitical maneuvering, nor should bloc confrontation and military expansion be allowed to take root again.

The international community should act with resolve to prevent the tragedies of World War II from being replicated and to defend the region's enduring peace. – Xinhua

## Duterte jurisdiction appeal quashed at ICC

THE HAGUE – International Criminal Court judges yesterday threw out a challenge against the court’s jurisdiction by Rodrigo Duterte, meaning the former Philippines president could still stand trial over his war on drugs.

The 81-year-old faces three counts of crimes against humanity at the international court based in The Hague over murders allegedly committed as part of his crackdown on drug users and pushers.

The allegations relate to his time as mayor of Davao city between 2013 and 2016 and then as president until March 2019, when the Philippines withdrew from the ICC.

Duterte’s defence had argued the court had no jurisdiction over alleged crimes in the Philippines because the country is no longer subject to the Rome Statute, the ICC’s founding text.

The prosecution countered that



Protesters hold placards in front of the International Criminal Court (ICC) ahead of the ruling on the appeal by the former Philippines president Rodrigo Duterte. – AFP

the alleged crimes occurred while the Philippines was still a member of the ICC and so judges can rule on Duterte’s case.

In an initial decision in October, the ICC pre-trial chamber sided with the prosecution, ruling that the investigation into Duterte began

before the Philippines withdrawal.

The appeals court threw out the defence team’s challenge to that decision.

The court “has rejected all four grounds of appeal,” said presiding judge Luz del Carmen Ibanez Carranza.

“Having rejected the entire appeal, the appeal chamber considers that the defence request for the immediate and unconditional release of Mr Duterte is moot,” she added.

Duterte’s defence lawyer Nicholas Kaufman said he was not surprised by the verdict given the fact that the Duterte trial is the one remaining high-profile case at the ICC.

“Allowing the appeal would have practically emptied the Court’s docket,” he said in a statement to AFP.

In a separate procedure, judges are weighing whether to confirm the charges against Duterte, the final

step before a trial, which would be the first against a former head of state from Asia.

At hearings in February, the prosecution alleged that Duterte was responsible for thousands of deaths during his war on drugs.

His defence said there was no “smoking gun” directly linking Duterte’s fiery rhetoric and threats against drug users and actual murders.

In any case, Duterte is unlikely to appear in court.

The court granted his request not to appear for the hearings in February, with his defence saying he was not mentally fit.

The only time he has been seen since his arrest and transfer to The Hague was at an initial appearance via videolink, at which he came across as confused and exhausted.

He did not appear at yesterday’s reading of the decision. – AFP

## Thailand ceremony at disputed border temple draws Cambodia rebuke

BANGKOK – Thailand held a Buddhist ceremony yesterday at ancient temple ruins it took control of during deadly border clashes with Cambodia last year, drawing a rebuke from its neighbour.

The two Southeast Asian countries have been at odds for decades over the demarcation of their 800-kilometre border, a legacy of the French colonial era.

The dispute erupted into several rounds of clashes last year, killing dozens of people in July and December, when Thailand took control of the centuries-old Ta Krabey temple that is known as Ta Krabey in Cambodia.

Thailand’s defence and culture ministers visited the temple yesterday to commemorate the 15th anniversary of April 2011 clashes at the site, as well as the fighting last year, a Thai defence ministry statement said.

The event included a delegation

of Thai officials and soldiers in uniform, chanting monks, water blessings and dancers in traditional costume, according to the statement and photos released by the defence ministry.

The Thai ministers attended the “merit-making ceremony dedicated to brave heroes on the anniversary of the Thai–Cambodian border clashes, while promoting cultural heritage conservation and the development of historical tourist attractions”, the ministry statement said.

Thai forces captured several areas in border provinces last year, territory that both sides claim.

Cambodia has repeatedly demanded their withdrawal and slammed Thailand over damage to several heritage temples sustained during last year’s fighting along the border.

The culture ministry in Phnom Penh blasted the “continued unlawful presence and activities

of Thai authorities and affiliated individuals at Ta Krabey Temple and its surrounding areas”, which it said yesterday were within Cambodian territory.

The ministry “strongly protests the presence of senior Thai officials, including the Minister of Culture and the Minister of Defence, at Ta Krabey Temple, as well as the organisation of activities at the site”, it said.

“Such high-level involvement reinforces the unlawful character of these actions, and undermines ongoing efforts toward a peaceful and negotiated settlement,” the ministry added.

Cambodia and Thailand signed a ceasefire agreement in late December that allows for border talks.

However, formal meetings have yet to resume and tensions on the frontier remain, with both sides trading accusations of truce violations. – AFP

## Pharma giant drops supplier after AFP deforestation investigation

Sara Hussein

BANGKOK – Pharmaceutical giant Haleon said it has dropped a supplier of “carbon-neutral” packaging after an AFP and The Gecko Project investigation yesterday revealed links to the clearing of Indonesian rainforest that is home to critically endangered orangutans.

The investigation found wood from plantations that cut down tens of thousands of hectares of forest was processed at an Indonesian mill supplying packaging firm Asia Symbol.

It supplied UK-based Haleon – known for household brands such as Panadol, Sensodyne and Centrum vitamins – with “carbon-neutral” packaging for its China operations.

AFP and investigative newsroom The Gecko Project used satellite imagery, government audit documents, trade data, ship-tracking information and open-

source material to trace timber from plantations in Indonesia to Asia Symbol factories in China.

Asia Symbol said it had placed the mill supplying the pulp under “enhanced due diligence”, but insisted the material used for packaging supplied to Haleon did not come from plantations linked to deforestation.

It did not provide evidence for how it separated supply chains.

Haleon said its own investigation found no evidence that “deforestation-linked material” entered its supply chain, but it was nonetheless “very concerned”.

“We have therefore asked our suppliers to ensure that any material supplied to Haleon is not sourced from Asia Symbol” or plantation companies “associated with risk of deforestation”.

Asia Symbol has a no-deforestation policy and its parent company, Singapore-headquartered

conglomerate Royal Golden Eagle, has committed to a deforestation-free supply chain since 2015.

Its bid to win back the environmental seal of approval granted by the Forest Stewardship Council has stalled over allegations of rights violations against Indigenous people by another of its subsidiaries.

“The findings of this investigation indicate that RGE is still very much in the business of deforestation,” said Robin Averbeck, forest programme director at Rainforest Action Network.

Indonesia has lost vast tracts of rainforest to plantations, mining and fires, threatening biodiverse landscapes that are home to endangered species like orangutans.

Forest loss has also been blamed for worsening natural disasters like last year’s flooding in Sumatra, which killed over 1,000 people. – AFP

## UN alarmed by Singapore executions

GENEVA – The United Nations voiced alarm yesterday at the number of people being executed in Singapore for drug-related offences, saying it was incompatible with human dignity.

UN rights chief Volker Turk said there had been a general shift away from the use of capital punishment in Asia, and Singapore was one of only a few countries imposing the death penalty for drug-related crimes not involving intentional killing.

The death penalty is mandatory in Singapore for drug trafficking above certain quantities, such as 500 grammes of cannabis or 15 grammes of heroin.

Turk pleaded in a statement with Singapore – and all other states still carrying out executions – “to impose a moratorium, as a critical step towards full legal abolition of this inhuman practice”.

Turk’s office said that of the 25 executions in Singapore in 2023 and 2024, 24 were reportedly for drug offences.

Last year, of the 17 people executed, 15 were convicted of drug-related crimes.

So far this year, eight people have been executed for such offences.

They include Omar bin Yacob Bamadhaj, who was executed last week for trafficking cannabis, with his family given two weeks’ notice.

The European Union, Britain, Switzerland and Norway had urged Singapore to halt his execution and commute his sentence to a non-capital one.

“At every level, the taking of this man’s life is both cruel and inhuman,” said Turk.

“The death penalty is fundamentally incompatible with human dignity and the right to life.”

Turk said drug-related offences not involving loss of life did not meet the “most serious crimes” standard set by international human rights law, which limits capital punishment to crimes of extreme gravity involving intentional killing.

It also requires strict compliance with full due process and fair trial guarantees, the UN high commissioner for human rights said.

Singapore officials maintain that the death penalty has made it one of the world’s safest cities, and a government survey in 2023 showed strong public support for capital punishment for serious crimes.

While the overall global trend continues to move towards universal abolition of the death penalty, Iran and a handful of other states such as Saudi Arabia and the United States saw executions surge last year. – AFP



A diorama depicting the fatal shooting of four students by security forces is seen at the May 12 Tragedy Museum on the Trisakti University campus in Jakarta yesterday. The “Trisakti Tragedy” occurred when four students were killed after security forces opened fire on protesters at Trisakti University. Outrage over the shootings helped spark the May 1998 riots, in which more than 1,000 people died across Indonesia amid widespread looting and arson during a severe economic crisis and growing opposition to President Suharto. – AFP

## India orders school water bells to beat heat

NEW DELHI – Schools in India's capital must ring regular bells to remind schoolchildren to drink water as the megacity gears up to face heatwave conditions, a new city order has said.

Summer heat in the world's most populous nation can be brutal – putting millions of people at risk, with nearly 11,000 people dying due to heat stroke between 2012 and 2021, according to government data.

A heatwave in May 2024 in

New Delhi saw temperatures match the capital's previous record high: 49.2C clocked in 2022.

That year was India's hottest year since thorough records began in 1901, with sizzling temperatures following a global pattern of extreme weather driven by climate change.

The temperature yesterday morning in New Delhi and the wider sprawling metropolitan region of 30 million residents was a relatively balmy 29.4C.

But weather forecasters predict temperatures would hit 41-43C later yesterday, and rise to 42-44C later in the week.

The India Meteorological Department has issued a "yellow alert" for Delhi, indicating the likelihood of a heatwave later in the week.

On Tuesday, guidelines issued by the Delhi education directorate asked schools in the city to adopt a plethora of steps to shield students.

They included avoiding

"outdoor physical activities" and conducting "awareness sessions" to remind them of the importance of hydration.

"Outdoor assemblies to be curtailed or conducted in shaded/indoor areas with minimal duration," the note read. "No open air classes to be conducted."

Quirker directions are also on offer: schools have been asked to start a "water bell" initiative to prevent dehydration and also

implement a "buddy system" for students to look out for each other.

"Schools shall implement a 'Water Bell' system, whereby a bell is rung at regular intervals (every 45-60 minutes) reminding students to drink water to prevent dehydration," the circular notes.

"Each student may be paired up with another student during school hours to monitor and take care of the each other's physical wellbeing," it added. – AFP

## S Korean court cuts jail time for battery CEO over deadly plant fire

SEOUL – A South Korean appeals court drastically cut the sentence of a battery company CEO yesterday after his conviction over one of the country's deadliest industrial disasters in years.

In June 2024, a fire ripped through an Aricell lithium battery factory in the city of Hwaseong, killing 23 people, mostly Chinese nationals.

A court sentenced Aricell CEO Park Soon-kwan to 15 years in prison in September last year, saying the company's practices had prioritised profit over worker safety.

Yesterday, the Suwon High Court reduced his sentence to four years on appeal, a court representative told AFP.

Park's son, a company executive, also had his jail term cut from 15 years to seven, he said.

The Yonhap news agency reported that the appeals court ruled there were "insufficient grounds" to conclude that Park had intended to evade liability under one of the laws he was charged with violating, the

Serious Accidents Punishment Act.

The court also said it had taken into account a collective settlement reached between the defendants and the families of the victims, news agency Newsis reported.

An attorney representing the families called the ruling "the worst sentencing in an industrial accident case".

"The judge ruled the defendant has not violated the emergency exit requirement law. But 21 victims died because the internal structure blocked the emergency passage," attorney Son Ik-chan told AFP.

"I want to ask whether this ruling meets common sense."

Prosecutors at Park's trials had sought a 20-year sentence, arguing that he had illegally hired foreign workers without adequate safety training and had dismantled fire safety structures inside the plant to boost production.

At his final hearing for the initial trial in July, Park apologised to the families, saying "no words can be enough" to ease their pain. – AFP

## Nepal's under-fire home minister Sudan Gurung resigns

KATHMANDU – Nepal's Home Minister Sudan Gurung announced his resignation yesterday amid growing criticism over his financial transactions since his election last month on an anti-corruption platform.

Gurung, a key figure in the Gen-Z protests last September that toppled Nepal's previous government, said he was stepping down to ensure a "fair investigation" into matters related to him.

"I have resigned from the position of Home Minister with effect from today," Gurung, 38, posted on his social media accounts.

"For me, morality is greater than a position and there is no greater power than public trust."

Dipa Dahal, press advisor to Prime Minister Balendra Shah, said his resignation has been received.

Gurung participated in the deadly protests that began as a demonstration against a brief social media ban, but were fed by wider grievances at corruption and a woeful economy.

At least 76 people were killed and more than 2,500 wounded during the two days of violence on September 7-8.

In January, Gurung joined the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP)



Nepal's newly sworn-in home minister Sudan Gurung (left) gestures as prime minister Balendra Shah (right) embraces his Rastriya Swatantra Party's president Rabi Lamichhane (second right) during their swearing-in ceremony in Kathmandu on March 27. – AFP

and won a seat in parliament after the party swept to a landslide victory in the March elections.

Gurung made headlines a day after taking his oath of office for arresting former prime minister KP Sharma Oli and ex-home minister Ramesh Lekhak for their alleged involvement in the deadly crackdown on protesters in September.

But soon he himself was beset by allegations over his financial investments and assets, as well as links with a controversial

businessman being investigated for money laundering.

On Monday, Gurung had dismissed the allegations as "rumours".

"I would just like to say that accusations and truth are not the same thing. Decisions should be based on evidence, not emotion," he said on social media.

Gurung is the second minister to resign in the new government after the labour minister was dismissed over code of conduct issues. – AFP

## S Korean fighter pilot fined for mid-air photos that caused crash

SEOUL – A South Korean fighter pilot has been ordered to pay 88 million won (US\$59,200) in damages over a 2021 mid-air collision he caused by trying to get photos and videos of himself flying, an official report said yesterday.

The pilot, whose identity was withheld, wanted to capture footage of his last sortie before reassignment, according to the report by the Board of Audit and Inspection.

While travelling at 578 kilometres per hour, he had the pilot of a second plane and another colleague take snaps of him on their phones.

In search of the perfect shot, he flipped his jet and flew close to the other aircraft, resulting in a misjudgement that caused his left stabilator – a horizontal stabiliser on a plane's tail – to collide with its wing.

There were no casualties, but the unsanctioned move caused 878 million won in damages.

The pilot's manoeuvre, which had not been coordinated with others in his formation, caused the aircraft to "invert up to 137 degrees so that its upper side could be captured on video", the report published yesterday said.

The defence ministry initially ordered him to pay the full amount but he appealed to the board, which reduced his liability to 10 percent of the total repair costs.

The board took into account that other pilots had previously conducted in-flight filming, and that he had still safely commanded the flight and returned to base without causing further damage.

"Since commissioning in 2010, the individual has served for an extended period as a fighter pilot, managing aircraft safely," the report said.

While the report did not specify what type of aircraft was involved, the Yonhap news agency said it was an F-15K. – AFP

## N Korean hackers suspected of US\$300 million crypto heist

SEOUL – A notorious North Korean hacking group is likely behind the theft of nearly US\$300 million in cryptocurrency over the weekend, an affected party has said, in the biggest known crypto heist this year.

It is the latest such incident linked to North Korea, whose sophisticated cybercrime programme uses stolen cryptocurrency to help fund its nuclear weapons development, according to a United Nations panel.

Digital currency news site CoinDesk said the heist on the vault of online investment tool KelpDAO on Saturday was 2026's biggest crypto exploit so far.

During the hack, two blockchain servers hosted by another crypto tech application called LayerZero

were compromised, KelpDAO said Tuesday.

That allowed a cryptocurrency token linked to the major Ethereum currency to be "drained" from KelpDAO, it said.

"On April 18, 2026, KelpDAO was exploited for approximately [US]\$290M," LayerZero said in a statement.

"Preliminary indicators suggest attribution to a highly-sophisticated state actor, likely DPRK's Lazarus Group," LayerZero said, using the initials of North Korea's official name.

It assured users that "there is zero contagion to any other cross-chain assets or applications".

Blockchain technology allows transactions to do away with middlemen, including governments

and banks – a concept known as decentralised finance (DeFi).

"This will make it more scary for new entrants to enter the DeFi world," said Henri Arslanian, co-founder of Nine Blocks Capital Management.

"This is clearly the job of North Korea's Lazarus group. No other group globally has the expertise and muscle power to conduct such a hack," he said yesterday in a note.

A UN panel estimated in 2024 that North Korea had stolen more than US\$3 billion in cryptocurrency since 2017.

Last year, the United States accused North Korea of being behind the theft of US\$1.5 billion worth of digital assets, then the largest crypto heist in history. – AFP

## Scepticism over Trump's Iran leadership split claim

Stuart Williams

PARIS – Iranian officials have kept a united front in the Middle East war and there appears for now to be no major split within the leadership, even though factional disagreements exist and the complete absence from public view of key decision makers creates confusion, analysts say.

Announcing an extension of the ceasefire in the war against the Islamic republic, US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday the move was partly “based on the fact that the Government of Iran is seriously fractured, not unexpectedly so”.

Iran's leadership has undergone immense upheaval since US and Israeli forces began striking the Islamic republic on February 28. Supreme leader Ali Khamenei and Revolutionary Guards chief Mohammad Pakpour were killed on the first day of the conflict and top security official Ali Larijani in March.

Yet their successors have remained largely invisible.

Ali Khamenei's son and successor Mojtaba is yet to appear in public after being named, and both new Revolutionary Guards chief Ahmad Vahidi and new security chief Mohammad Bagher Zolghadr have restricted themselves to written condolence messages for colleagues killed in the war.

But high profile figures who have survived the war in their

posts – notably parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and President Masoud Pezeshkian – have largely backed a unified policy of pursuing diplomacy with the US to end the war without offering concessions.

### ‘Not aired publicly’

“I imagine there are some differences between major power centres and political currents,” said Farzan Sabet, a managing researcher at the Geneva Graduate Institute.

“But it's not clear that these differences and internal debates mean there is a major conflict happening within the Iranian leadership or that they are seriously fractured. They appear to maintain their overall cohesion and ability to make decisions and act on them,” he added.

In the absence of Mojtaba Khamenei, Vahidi and Zolghadr, the frontman of both the war effort and diplomacy has been Ghalibaf, a former commander of the Revolutionary Guards and national police chief who has also held civilian posts such as Tehran mayor and now parliament speaker.

Ghalibaf earlier this month led the Iranian delegation for talks with the US in Islamabad, meeting Vice President JD Vance in the highest level Iran-US encounter since before the Islamic revolution. On April 16 he also met Asim Munir – the army chief of key mediator



**Iranians carry national flags and portraits of Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei and his late father Ayatollah Ali Khamenei during a memorial ceremony at the Iranian Embassy in Beirut yesterday. Israel's foreign minister yesterday urged Beirut to make joint efforts with Israel to counter the Lebanese armed group Hezbollah, ahead of talks between the countries set to resume in Washington. – AFP**

Pakistan – in Tehran.

Despite prolific posting on X in English and Persian, Ghalibaf has rarely been seen in public in Iran during the war. Late last week, however, he gave a lengthy interview to state TV where he defended pursuing diplomacy in what may have been a response to headline criticism.

“This system does have factional divisions that are reflected in tactics against the Trump administration and negotiations, but these are not generally aired publicly,” said Sanam Vakil, director of the Middle East and North Africa Programme at Chatham House in London.

“There's no solid public evidence confirming a major internal split at the top of Iran's leadership right now, so the claim should be treated cautiously,” she told AFP.

“It makes sense that Vahidi and Mojtaba Khamenei have not been seen because Tehran is still worried about Israeli assassinations.”

### ‘Important and difficult debates’

But politics in the Islamic republic – a theocracy with a supreme leader appointed for life but also a directly elected parliament and president – has never been entirely monolithic, with hardliners

and more moderate forces vying for position since the ousting of the shah in 1979.

Thomas Juneau, professor at the University of Ottawa, said there is “no public evidence that the Iranian leadership is seriously fractured” but added: “I have no doubt that behind the scenes, there are important and difficult debates within the Iranian leadership both on next steps and on succession issues.”

He emphasised that it is “the norm, not exception” that there is closed-door debate within the top echelons of the Islamic republic, especially at a time of such stress.

“There is most likely a high degree of paranoia as a result of the heavy Israeli intelligence penetration,” which had led to the killing of its leaders, he said.

The situation has been more confused since the killing of Ali Khamenei, who was leader since 1989 and had the final say on all major issues, making his stance clear in regular televised speeches.

“Mojtaba Khamenei appears to maintain broad oversight of decision-making, but nowhere near the same level of day-to-day management as his father, probably due to a combination of security concerns and physical incapacitation,” said Sabet.

This means the Revolutionary Guards ideological army under Vahidi “now more nakedly exercises power”, he added. – AFP

## New drugs raise hopes of pancreatic cancer breakthrough

Julien Dury

PARIS – After decades of struggling to find a way to treat pancreatic cancer, researchers have developed several promising new drugs that could offer rare hope to patients given this particularly deadly diagnosis.

Pancreatic cancer is notoriously aggressive, with only roughly one in 10 people surviving more than five years after being diagnosed, research has shown.

Rates of this cancer have also been surging worldwide, notably among young adults. It is projected to become the second deadliest cancer, after lung cancer, in developed countries in the coming years.

Despite the scale of this scourge, there has not been “any medical progress for 40 years,” Patrick Mehlen, a researcher at France's Leon Berard cancer centre, told AFP.

But more funding and interest over the last decade has finally been making a “real difference,” he added.

While a cure is still a long way off for most patients, some of these new drugs could add precious months to their lifespan.

The most widely celebrated news came last week, when US pharma firm Revolution Medicines announced positive results for its experimental drug daraxonrasib.

The drug targets a protein called KRAS which is known to play an important role in tumour growth.

Half of the patients taking the pill survived more than 13 months – twice as long as a control group receiving chemotherapy.

This may not sound revolutionary, but for a cancer that kills so quickly, doubling the life expectancy of patients is unprecedented.

### ‘Heck of a lot better’

One high-profile patient has spoken out about just what a difference the drug can make.

Ben Sasse, a former senator from the US state of Nebraska, started taking daraxonrasib after being diagnosed with metastasised, stage-four pancreatic cancer late last year.

“In mid-December I got a three-to-four month life expectancy,” the 54-year-old told the New York Times.

After taking the drug, “I'm doing a heck of a lot better than I was doing at Christmas,” Sasse said.

He added that it was “a nasty drug”, pointing to severe side effects that left his face peeling and bloody.

Revolution Medicines has said it will soon apply for its treatment to be approved in the United States. More detailed results about the phase 3 trial will be presented at the ASCO cancer conference in Chicago next month.

Meanwhile, other researchers have been exploring alternative ways to extend the lives of pancreatic cancer patients.

Early trial results, published in the journal Nature yesterday, tested a treatment that is not designed to directly eradicate tumours.

Instead, it aims to prevent cancerous cells from starting a process that makes them resistant to other drugs – including chemotherapy.

The NP137 antibody was tested on 43 patients receiving chemo whose cancer had spread through their pancreas, but not to other parts of their body.

Compared to normal survival rates, the patients lived several months longer, according to the phase 1b trial.

“We're giving people an average of six months more – which is significant for this disease,” said Mehlen, who supervised the research.

The team plans to conduct another trial with a larger sample size and a control group later this year.

Ultimately, Mehlen hopes his drug will not just extend the lives of people receiving chemotherapy, but also daraxonrasib.

### New cancer vaccine

Promising early trial results were also announced over the weekend for an experimental pancreatic cancer vaccine.

The vaccine, which uses the messenger RNA technology that came to prominence during the Covid-19 pandemic, was developed by pharma firms BioNTech and Genentech.

During the phase 1 trial, 16 patients who already had pancreatic cancer were given the shot.

It promoted immune cells to target cancerous cells in eight of the patients, seven of whom were still alive six years later.

Out of the eight patients whose immune systems did not respond to the vaccine, just two survived that long.

Phase 1 trials are designed to determine whether drugs are safe, not demonstrate they are effective, so more research is planned. – AFP

## Over 50,000 Lebanon housing units damaged, destroyed in Israel war: govt estimate

BEIRUT – Israeli attacks on Lebanon during its latest war with Hezbollah damaged or destroyed more than 50,000 housing units in the country, a government estimate found yesterday.

“Within about 45 days [of the war], we had 17,756 destroyed housing units and 32,668 damaged housing units,” Chadi Abdallah, head of the National Council for Scientific Research (CNRS), told AFP.

Israeli attacks on Lebanon killed more than 2,400 people and displaced more than a million since Iran-backed Hezbollah drew the country into the Middle East war on March 2.

Despite an ongoing 10-day truce that started on Friday, Israeli forces have continued to demolish and blow up homes in southern Lebanese towns they currently occupy, according to Lebanese authorities, eyewitnesses, and photographs taken by AFP from the Israeli side.

The CNRS estimates that “428 housing units were destroyed and 50 were damaged” during the first three days of the ceasefire, Abdallah said.

Lebanon is set to ask for an extension of the truce during its next talks with Israel on Thursday, a Lebanese official told AFP.

Hezbollah and Israel had previously clashed for more than a year in 2023, escalating into two months of full-blown war in late 2024 until a November ceasefire sought to end the hostilities.

Israel continued to strike Lebanon despite the previous truce and kept troops positions at five border points.

“The aggression that extended between 2023 and 2025, which is in fact an aggression that did not stop, left behind enormous destruction at various levels,” Lebanese Environment Minister Tamara Zein said at the press conference.

She added that “more than 220,000 housing units were damaged and destroyed” during that period.

Zein added that Israel's strikes did not spare residential neighbourhoods, civilian infrastructure and places of worship, and resulted in damage to large agricultural and forested areas.

– AFP

## Prosecutors seek dismissal of graft case against Spain PM's wife

MADRID – Spanish public prosecutors said yesterday they had requested the dismissal of a corruption case against Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez's wife, arguing the facts under investigation do not constitute a criminal offence.

The Begoña Gómez affair is one of several alleged corruption cases to have hit the Socialist leader's family and former allies, putting pressure on his minority coalition government.

Investigating judge Juan Carlos Peinado opened an investigation in April 2024 to determine whether Gómez had exploited her position as Sánchez's wife for private gain, allegations both she and the prime minister deny.

Earlier this month, he charged her with embezzlement, influence peddling, corruption in business dealings and misappropriation of funds after completing his investigation.

A Madrid provincial court must now decide whether Gómez will stand trial.

But the Madrid public prosecutor's office on Tuesday appealed the judge's ruling and asked the court to dismiss the

case, saying "the facts do not constitute a criminal offence," according to a statement yesterday.

The case centres on the creation and management of a chair at Madrid's Complutense University that was co-directed by Gómez, as well as the alleged use of public resources and personal connections to advance private interests.

It stems from a complaint filed by an anti-corruption group with far-right links called Hazte Oír (Make Yourself Heard). The group uses a legal mechanism allowing third parties to request criminal investigations.

The prime minister's brother, David Sánchez, has also been indicted in a separate investigation into alleged influence peddling after he was hired by a regional government. He will go on trial at the end of May.

Pedro Sánchez's former right-hand man and ex-transport minister, José Luis Ábalos, went on trial this month over alleged kickbacks linked to public contracts.

– AFP

## Montenegro moves one step closer to EU membership

BRUSSELS – Montenegro moved one step closer to EU membership yesterday, as the bloc's countries agreed to start work on an accession treaty for the small Balkan nation, officials said.

Ambassadors from the EU's 27 current member states decided to set up an "ad hoc working party" for the drafting an accession pact – a technical but key step in the path towards membership, an official said.

"Congratulations to Montenegro – today we took a big step towards your accession to the European Union," said yesterday European Council president António Costa hailing what he described as a "key milestone".

For the first time in over a decade "the EU starts the clock for the next enlargement", he added.

Montenegro is, with Albania, a frontrunner to become the first country to join the European Union since Croatia was admitted to the club in 2013.

Montenegro has concluded negotiations on 14 of 35 so-called "clusters" – a round of talks grouped around different subjects, from taxation to environmental policy – raising hopes it could become an EU member in the coming years.

"We are confident that this will send a powerful signal that accession is within reach for enlargement partners," a spokesperson for Cyprus, which holds the EU's rotating presidency, said of the decision taken during a meeting in Brussels.

"Excellent news is coming from Brussels," commented Montenegrin Minister for European Affairs Maida Gorcevic.

The establishment of the working group was "yet another confirmation that we are on the right path for Montenegro to become the 28th member of the European Union by 2028," she added.

– AFP

## Colombian president says ends peace talks with rebel group

BOGOTÁ – Colombian President Gustavo Petro announced the end of peace talks with a leading rebel group on Tuesday, a blow to his fight against armed factions involved in drug trafficking.

Petro took office in 2022 with the aim of reaching peace deals with the various dissident groups fighting for control over Colombia's lucrative cocaine trade.

But with four months left in his term, no significant progress has been made toward that goal.

Petro, himself a former guerrilla, had been engaged in peace talks since 2023 with Calarcá Córdoba, commander of a dissident faction of the defunct Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

Calarcá Córdoba's faction known as "EMBF" had refused a 2016 peace deal in which FARC agreed to lay down arms.

In another major setback, Colombia's largest armed drugs trafficking organisation, the powerful Clan del Golfo, ruled out a peace deal on Tuesday with Petro – who is set to conclude his four-year term on August 7.

Both negotiations were central pillars of Petro's "Total Peace" plan to reach deals with armed factions in the world's largest cocaine producer.

Calarcá has pressed on with attacks against security forces and civilians in areas where his guerrilla group is active, mostly on the border with Venezuela and in the Amazon region.

– AFP

## Germany halves 2026 growth forecast on Iran war fallout



Germany's Economy Minister Katherina Reiche addresses a press conference to present the German government's spring projections, in Berlin yesterday.

– AFP

BERLIN – The German government yesterday halved its 2026 growth forecast due to the Middle East war energy shock, while vowing to step up reform efforts as criticism grows they are moving too slowly.

Gross domestic product (GDP) in Europe's biggest economy is expected to expand 0.5 percent in 2026, officials said, down from a projection of one percent made in January.

The government also cut its forecast for 2027 to 0.9 percent, down from 1.3 percent.

Hopes had been high that the eurozone's traditional growth engine would sputter back to life in 2026 after years of stagnation, driven by Chancellor Friedrich Merz's public spending blitz.

But the jump in oil and gas prices since the start of the US-Israeli war on Iran has dealt the economy a heavy blow, pushing up overall inflation and raising costs for the country's crucial manufacturers.

Presenting the new forecasts, Economy Minister Katherina Reiche said that before the conflict, there had been signs of a moderate recovery.

"But the escalation in the Middle East has set us back economically," she told a press conference in Berlin. "The shock has hit the structurally weakened German economy hard once again."

More costly energy was weighing on industry while the public finances were being strained by a rise in government borrowing costs on international markets since the outbreak of the conflict in February, Reiche said.

The downgraded forecasts follow a similar move by leading economic institutes in early April, which are now forecasting just 0.6 percent growth this year.

Germany has lagged behind the European average in terms of growth in recent times, highlighting the deep problems facing its industrial base in particular.

### Renewed energy cost surge

Before the Iran war, the economy was just getting back on its feet after the energy shock triggered by the Ukraine war and last year's US tariff blitz.

The renewed surge in energy prices is a particular burden for Germany's heavy industry, in sectors ranging from steel to chemicals, which was also struggling with weak demand in export markets.

Knock-on effects, like supply chain snarls that are delaying delivery of vital base products, are weighing on industry, while consumers are facing higher costs, especially at the petrol pump.

The government yesterday also raised its inflation forecasts, to 2.7 percent in 2026 and 2.8 percent in 2027, compared to 2.2 percent in 2025.

Surveys highlight the darkening picture.

A poll this week showed that German investor morale hit its lowest level in April since late 2022, when the country was battling the fallout from the war in Ukraine.

### 'Swift, determined reforms'

The government is scrambling to respond. As well as the relief on fuel prices, Merz has announced that businesses can pay workers a tax-free bonus of up to 1,000 euros (US\$1,170).

Still, many economists and business groups have criticised the measures as ill conceived, saying they are not properly targeted at needy groups.

While defending the policies, Reiche also acknowledged there should be a renewed focus on pushing through deep reforms to areas like healthcare, pensions and bureaucracy.

"Without swift and determined reforms, our country will lack the basis to secure future growth and prosperity," she said.

Businesses have become increasingly frustrated with the slow pace of progress from Merz's coalition.

The chancellor, who took power in May last year, promised to revive the economy through huge public outlays on defence and infrastructure and a barrage of reforms.

But the spending has moved slowly and structural overhauls have made little headway, bogged down by lengthy talks between his centre-right CDU/CSU party alliance and its coalition partners, the centre-left SPD.

The coalition is promising to push through an ambitious programme before parliament's summer recess, though critics doubt what can realistically be achieved so quickly.

Reiche – who is from the CDU/CSU and has clashed with SPD colleagues on issues including energy policy – stressed that the Iran conflict should not distract Germany's leaders from important tasks.

"The crisis must not blind us from what we need to do," she said.

– AFP, MPD

# Macao to help China-Portugal cooperation reach new level: CE Sam



Portuguese President António José Seguro (right) meets with Chief Executive of the Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Sam Hou Fai in Lisbon on Tuesday. – Xinhua

LISBON – Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai said in Lisbon on Tuesday that during his four-day working visit to Portugal, the two sides agreed to use Macao’s platform to strengthen China-Portugal economic cooperation.

On Tuesday, Sam met separately with Portuguese President António José Seguro, Speaker of Parliament José Pedro Aguiar-Branco, Prime Minister Luis Montenegro, and President of the Supreme Court of Justice João Cura Mariano. During the meetings, he briefed the Portuguese side on the successful practice of “One Country, Two Systems” in Macao.

Speaking at a media briefing at the end of his visit, Sam said the visit had yielded fruitful

results, achieving the goals of enhancing mutual understanding, consolidating the traditional friendship and strengthening all-round cooperation.

He expressed confidence that China-Portugal cooperation would reach a new level, with Macao continuing to leverage its unique advantages to contribute further to the comprehensive strategic partnership between China and Portugal.

For his part, Seguro pointed out that Portugal and China established diplomatic relations in 1979 and formed a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2005, noting that the two countries have long enjoyed close and friendly ties, with growing political mutual trust, frequent high-level exchanges, and

strong cooperation across various fields.

Portugal will continue to adhere to the one-China principle and further advance all-round cooperation between the two countries, he added.

Sam arrived in Lisbon, the first stop of his visit, on Saturday. During the visit, Sam also held discussions with several Portuguese ministers and attended a presentation on the achievements of the successful implementation of “One Country, Two Systems” in Macao.

Sam arrived in Madrid for a working visit on Tuesday evening (local time). He is slated to visit Geneva and Brussels before arriving back in Macao on Sunday.

– Xinhua, MPD

## Court confirms Neymar corruption acquittal over Barcelona transfer

BARCELONA – Spain’s Supreme Court yesterday announced it had confirmed the acquittal of Neymar and former Barcelona presidents of corruption charges centred on the Brazil star’s 2013 transfer to the Catalan giants.

Brazilian sports investment firm DIS initially took legal action in 2015, saying it lost out financially on Neymar’s transfer because it owned 40 percent of his sporting rights when he was a young prospect at Santos FC.

DIS said the true value of the deal had been obscured by those involved and that it was not informed of the existence of an exclusivity contract in 2011 between Neymar and Barcelona.

But a Spanish court acquitted all defendants – including Neymar, his parents and former Barcelona

presidents Josep Maria Bartomeu and Sandro Rosell – of corruption and fraud in a highly publicised trial in 2022.

Santos, its former president Odílio Rodrigues Filho and N&N – the company founded by Neymar’s parents to manage his career – were also cleared.

DIS appealed the verdict, but the Supreme Court said “the proven facts have revealed the inconsistency of the accusation”.

“There was neither an offence of corruption in business dealings nor improper fraud, neither by the player, his representatives nor FC Barcelona,” the court said in a statement.

“It was all due to a sporting decision by the club, which wanted to ensure his signing and then decided to bring it forward,” it

added, with several rival teams coveting Neymar at the time.

DIS was seeking to recover 35 million euros (US\$41 million) it claims it was cheated of.

Barça (the nickname of FC Barcelona) said the transfer cost 57.1 million euros, with 40 million euros paid to N&N and 17.1 million to Santos, of which 6.8 million was given to DIS.

Prosecutors had initially sought a two-year jail term and a 10-million-euro fine for Neymar, but in a surprise move they dropped corruption and fraud charges against all the accused.

Neymar, who is now back at Santos, also faced tax fraud allegations deriving from the same transfer. That affair ended in 2016, when Barcelona paid a fine of 5.5 million euros in a deal with prosecutors. – AFP

## Sheinbaum says Mexican military unaware of US agents

MEXICO CITY – Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum told reporters yesterday that the Mexican military was unaware of the presence of US agents who were reported to have died in a car accident during an antidrug operation in the border state of Chihuahua.

“Evidently, the military didn’t know there were people participating who weren’t Mexican citizens... that there were foreigners participating in the operation,” Sheinbaum told reporters.

“This is something that Mexicans shouldn’t take lightly.”

Sheinbaum said the federal government was still investigating a potential violation of national security laws in the still-murky incident.

Two US embassy employees perished in a car accident, the US ambassador in Mexico City said on Sunday.

Mexican authorities have given a fuller picture, saying the Americans died alongside two Mexican police officers and had taken part in a raid on a clandestine drug lab in the northern state’s remote sierra.

The five-car convoy included soldiers and members of the Chihuahua State Investigation Agency, authorities said.

The US agents killed were “instructor officers” who “were carrying out training tasks” as part of binational anti-drug cooperation, according to prosecutor César Jáuregui.

US media reports have identified the US personnel as CIA agents.

On-the-ground cooperation between US law enforcement and Mexican security forces is historically rare and a politically sensitive topic in the country.

Sheinbaum has publicly rejected the practice.

Home to the key border city of Juárez, Chihuahua is one of only four out of 31 states governed by the conservative National Political Action (PAN) party, which opposes Sheinbaum’s left-leaning Morena party.

The leader said she planned to meet with the Chihuahua state governor to discuss the incident.

Sheinbaum has resisted the Trump administration’s threats to use airstrikes or ground troops to fight Mexican cartels, instead promoting intelligence sharing with the US while local security forces attack crime groups.

Elite Mexican troops operating with US intelligence killed drug kingpin Nemesio “El Mencho” Oseguera in February, unleashing a wave of violence that left over 70 dead. – AFP

## Michelle Bachelet hopes world is ready for female UN chief



Former Chilean president Michelle Bachelet takes part in a discussion at the University of Valparaiso, Chile, on March 31, 2026. – AFP

UNITED NATIONS – Former Chilean president Michelle Bachelet, a candidate for UN secretary-general, said on Tuesday she hoped the world is finally “ready” for a woman in the position.

Since the United Nations was founded after World War II, all nine UN chiefs have been men, although many countries have advocated for the appointment of a woman.

In 2016, despite several female candidates, António Guterres of Portugal won the race.

“If I am polite, I would say the world was not prepared for it. Is it prepared now? I hope so,” Bachelet, 74, told reporters after a three-hour hearing before member states.

“It will be a very good signal,” she said. “It could get hope for many people.”

In a world ravaged by wars, the candidate pleaded with member states to rebuild trust in the UN, particularly by continuing the organisation’s reform amid a political and financial crisis.

She also advocated for a secretary-general who would be “present in the field,” somebody

“who has the moral voice” and a “diplomatic stature that can be heard” by powerful states.

While distrust of the UN is often illustrated by the Security Council’s paralysis on many pressing issues, she acknowledged that she had no “magic formula” to change things.

“I don’t have a magic potion that I can give to member states” – especially, she said, the five permanent, veto-wielding members of the Security Council – so that “everybody’s friends.”

Three other candidates – Argentina’s Rafael Grossi, Costa Rica’s Rebeca Grynspan and Senegal’s Macky Sall – were also interviewed by member states on Tuesday and yesterday, hoping to secure what General Assembly President Annalena Baerbock described as “one of the toughest jobs in the world.”

When asked what makes her the best candidate to succeed Guterres on January 1, 2027, Bachelet emphasised her “extensive experience.” As for questions about her age, she said, “I have accumulative youth.” – AFP

# Former Premier League champions Leicester relegated to 3<sup>rd</sup> tier

Steven Griffiths



LONDON – Former Premier League champions Leicester were relegated to the third tier for only the second time in their history after a 2-2 draw against Hull on Tuesday.

Gary Rowett's side needed a victory at the King Power Stadium to keep alive their slender hopes of avoiding relegation.

But the Foxes were denied by Oli McBurnie's second-half equaliser, which condemned them to League One just 10 years after they were crowned English champions in a fairytale triumph.

Liam Millar put Hull ahead in the 18<sup>th</sup> minute before Leicester equalised through James Justin's 52<sup>nd</sup>-minute penalty.

Luke Thomas put Leicester ahead two minutes later, but McBurnie extinguished their dreams of a great escape with his 63<sup>rd</sup>-minute leveller.

Second-bottom Leicester are seven points from safety with just two games left.

Leicester will play in the third tier for the first time since 2008-09 following an astonishing decline over the last five years.

"We have to learn. I think the club have to accept this is the horrible part of the journey of a football club," Rowett said.

"This club won the Premier League not too many moons ago. That was an incredible high at the time for the fans, for everyone associated with the club.

"I think everyone saw that as an amazing achievement. I think we can be equally as disappointed with how poor this moment is."

It is a third relegation in four seasons for Leicester, who dropped out of the Premier League in 2023 and 2025.

After Jamie Vardy, Riyad Mahrez, N'Golo Kante and company

defied 5,000-1 odds by winning the Premier League in 2016, Leicester reached the Champions League quarter-finals the next season and won the FA Cup in 2021.

But Leicester's golden era is a distant memory as they face the unpalatable prospect of playing the likes of Bromley, Mansfield and Wycombe next season.

"The bigger picture is you don't get relegated over three or four games, you get relegated over a season," Rowett said.

"The club has to rise again but it has to learn its lessons because it's certainly been a season of an awful lot of regret."

Crashing out of the Premier League in limp fashion three years ago should have been a wake-up call for Leicester's Thai owner Aiyawatt Srivaddhanaprabha and much-maligned sporting director Jon Rudkin.

## Turmoil on and off pitch

But Leicester's hierarchy were painfully slow to address numerous flaws on the pitch, while the club's ruinous finances have cost them with a six-point deduction this season for breaching spending rules.

Vardy's departure at the end of last season severed the last tie with the title-winning squad.

Marti Cifuentes, hired to lead a promotion push, struggled to rebuild an unbalanced and inexperienced squad before his sacking in January.

Interim boss Andy King was unable to turn the tide and relegation fears began to mount after Leicester blew a 3-0 half-time lead in a dismal 4-3 defeat against Southampton.

By the time Rowett was hired in February, the Foxes were two points from safety and the former Leicester defender has mustered only one win from his 12 matches since.

Boardroom blunders have been the defining influence on Leicester's

plummet towards League One.

Claudio Ranieri, architect of their title-winning campaign, was sacked just months after lifting the trophy, with Craig Shakespeare and then Claude Puel proving inadequate replacements.

Brendan Rodgers, who masterminded the club's FA Cup triumph and two fifth-placed finishes in the Premier League, was dismissed as relegation beckoned in 2023.

Elsewhere on Tuesday, Coventry clinched the Championship title with a 5-1 rout of Portsmouth.

Frank Lampard's side had sealed promotion back to the top flight after a 25-year absence with a draw at Blackburn on Friday.

Millwall climbed to second place with a 3-1 win at Stoke, while fourth-placed Southampton's bid for automatic promotion was dented by a 2-2 draw against Bristol City.

– AFP

## Shabab Al Ahli cry foul over Asian Champions League semi-final defeat



RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA – UAE side Shabab Al Ahli yesterday formally requested that their Asian Champions League semi-final against Japanese club Machida Zelvia be replayed, claiming that their late equaliser should have stood.

The Emirati side were beaten 1-0 in Jeddah on Tuesday but a club source told AFP that the referee made a technical error in disallowing a 93<sup>rd</sup>-minute equaliser.

Machida Zelvia took the lead through Yuki Soma in the 12<sup>th</sup> minute and Shabab Al Ahli believed their Brazilian winger Guilherme Bala had levelled the scores as the seconds clock ticked towards the final whistle.

But Australian referee Shaun Evans disallowed the goal after consulting the Video Assistant

Referee (VAR), which ruled that the Emirati side had taken the throw-in that led to the goal before the Japanese team had completed a substitution.

The Shabab Al Ahli source, who asked not to be named, told AFP: "An official objection was submitted by the club before the team left the stadium.

"The objection includes a request to replay the match, and therefore it was decided to keep the team in Jeddah until a decision is made on our request."

The appeal will have to be considered rapidly because Machida Zelvia will face defending champions Al Ahli of Saudi Arabia in the final on Saturday.

The UAE Football Association has pledged its support for Shabab Al Ahli "in any step it takes to safeguard its rights" and called on the Asian

Football Confederation (AFC) to "select appropriate referee teams for the competitions it organises".

Furious Shabab Al Ahli players protested to the referee at the end of the match, and goalkeeper Hamad Al Maqbali received a red card.

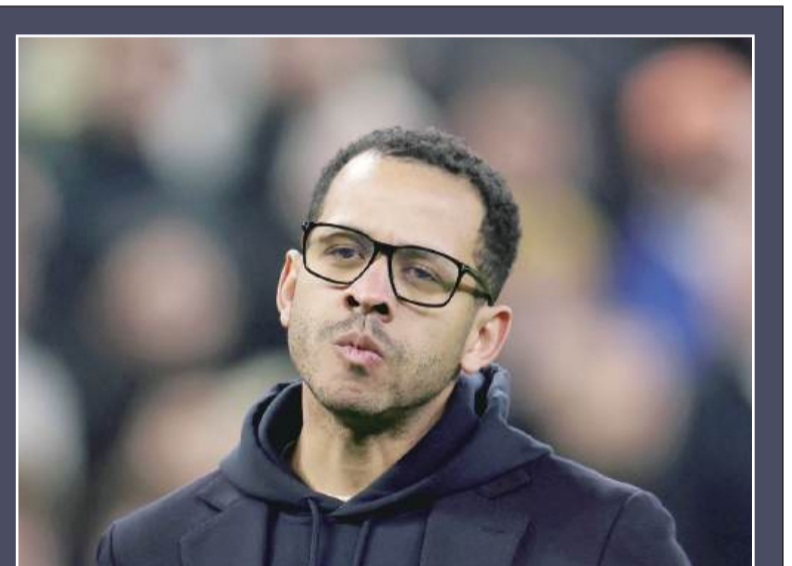
Al Maqbali said: "The referee wanted us to be eliminated, and he succeeded in doing so."

Shabab Al Ahli's Portuguese head coach Paulo Sousa said: "The referee treated Shabab Al Ahli unfairly and disallowed a legitimate goal due to a serious technical error. He was the one who allowed play to resume, so why did he disallow the goal afterward?"

He added: "Everyone's level has improved at this stage of the tournament, except the refereeing."

AFP has contacted the AFC for comment.

– AFP



Chelsea's English head coach Liam Rosenior reacts following the English Premier League match against Everton at the Hill Dickinson Stadium in Liverpool, north-west England on March 21.

Liam Rosenior has been sacked after three months as Chelsea manager following a run of five successive Premier League defeats, the club announced yesterday.

– AFP

## New batch of World Cup tickets to go on sale



WASHINGTON – A new batch of World Cup tickets to all 104 matches went on sale yesterday, just 50 days before the tournament kicks off, FIFA said Tuesday.

Tickets to games across the United States, Mexico and Canada will be available via FIFA's website "on a first-come, first-served basis" from 1500 GMT, [11 p.m. last night Macau time] the sport's governing body said in a statement.

"Along with this set of tickets, additional tickets will continue to be released to the public on an ongoing basis up until the final on Sunday, 19 July (subject to availability)," it said.

The latest batch of tickets comes after FIFA President Gianni Infantino said more than five million tickets have already been sold to the tournament, which begins June 11.

The most tickets ever sold previously for a World Cup was 3.5 million, when the event was

last held in the US back in 1994. Based on the capacity of the 16 stadiums hosting this tournament, approximately seven million tickets are expected to be available in total for the 2026 edition.

FIFA has come under fire for the sky-high prices of tickets, with the most expensive ticket for the World Cup final surpassing US\$10,000, excluding the re-sale market.

Organisers have defended the pricing of tickets, which Infantino attributed to "crazy" demand, and used a "dynamic pricing" strategy where prices are automatically raised for high-demand matches.

On Tuesday, *The Athletic* reported that ticket sales were lagging for the United States team's high-priced World Cup opener against Paraguay in Los Angeles – a claim disputed by FIFA.

"Ticket sales for the FIFA World Cup remain strong with a high degree of interest for all matches," a FIFA spokesperson told AFP.

– AFP

## Football shorts



### Laporte hamstring injury could be a World Cup issue for Spain defender

MADRID – Athletic Bilbao defender Aymeric Laporte's place in Spain's World Cup squad could be in doubt after he suffered a hamstring injury in his side's 1-0 home win over Osasuna on Tuesday night.

Laporte was forced off midway through the second half with the problem and was replaced by Dani Vivian, who had not started after suffering a knock in training earlier in the week.

Athletic Bilbao coach Ernesto Valverde said after the game that the defender had suffered a "strain" but declined to comment on how long he could be sidelined.

However, with Spain coach Luis de la Fuente due to name his World Cup squad after La Liga finishes on May 24 and Spain set to open its campaign against Cape Verde on June 15, the 31-year-old, who turns 32 at the end of May, does not have much time to recover.

– Xinhua

### Militao suffers hamstring injury as Bernabeu crowd vents frustration at players

MADRID – Real Madrid defender Eder Militao suffered a hamstring injury in his side's 2-1 home win over Alaves on Tuesday night.

The Brazil international suffered the injury in an

incident that saw him head the ball against the crossbar moments before halftime and he asked for medical assistance as soon as he hit the ground.

Militao was replaced by Antonio Rudiger and will certainly miss tomorrow's home game against Betis and the following weekend's away match against Espanyol, although the injury will not put his place at the World Cup finals in jeopardy.

The Brazilian has only recently returned to action after four months out with a knee injury.

The game also highlighted the strained atmosphere at the Santiago Bernabeu, as Real Madrid was booed off the pitch by a section of their supporters.

Brazil forward Vinicius Jr was a particular target for criticism, being booed and whistled several times, and he even made a gesture of apology after scoring his side's second goal.

Vinicius' contract with Real Madrid expires at the end of June 2027 and although he has always said he wants to sign a new deal, his relationship with the supporters could still lead to a change of plans.

Eduardo Camavinga was also singled out after coming on as a late substitute, with many supporters blaming the Frenchman for the sending-off that decisively tilted the Champions League quarterfinal in Bayern Munich's favor a week ago.

– Xinhua

# French teenager Seixas becomes youngest Fleche Wallonne winner

## Cycling

HUY, BELGIUM – French prodigy Paul Seixas at 19 became the youngest winner of the La Fleche Wallonne one-day classic yesterday in his first ride in the race.

Seixas beat home Switzerland's Mauro Schmid and British rider Ben Tulett to replace Philemon De Meersman in the race's history books as the Belgian was 21 years old and 150 days when he won in 1936.

It was the dream preparation for an altogether tougher task in facing Slovenian great Tadej Pogacar, who was absent, at Liege-Bastogne-Liege on Sunday.

Pogacar, a two-time winner of the Fleche Wallonne, could only finish 53<sup>rd</sup> on his debut in the race in 2019.

"It is unbelievable, this is a huge victory," said Seixas.

"I was just saying to myself last year I was watching the race on TV, and this year I have won it the first time I took part."

Seixas's opponents had no answer to his surge around 300

metres from the finishing line after a punishing climb.

"I went with my gut feeling to be honest," he said.

"I saw that everyone was at their limit, so I made an extra effort.

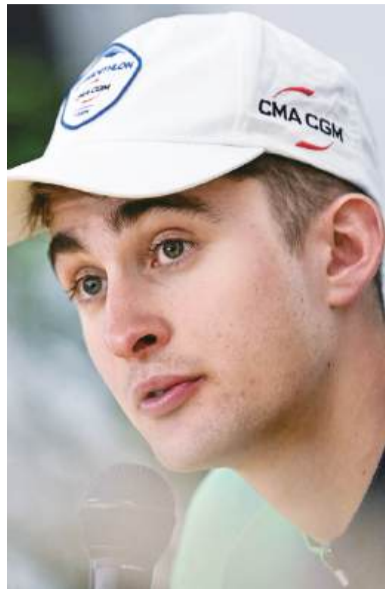
"I tried to gauge how my adversaries were and when I saw they were tiring a bit, I said to myself I have to dig deep till the top of the climb."

Seixas finished with his right elbow bloodied, but he said it was not due to a fall and it was an old wound which opened when the peloton was tightly-packed.

Seixas is regarded as the finest talent France has produced in decades.

He has backed that up this season by winning the Tour of the Basque Country stage race and the Ardeche Classic. He also finished runner-up in the Tour of the Algarve and the Strade Bianche.

However, whether he can beat both Pogacar and another big absentee from yesterday's race Remco Evenepoel, who won last Sunday's Amstel Gold classic, in the Liege-Bastogne-Liege is the big question.



Decathlon CMA CGM Team's French Paul Seixas speaks during a press conference after winning 'La Fleche Wallonne' one day cycling race, 200 km from Herstal to Huy, in Belgium yesterday. – AFP

"That is going to be a different level of challenge," said Seixas.

"Of course I will give it my all to win.

"Today, though, shows I am in great form." – AFP

# Eala sails into 2<sup>nd</sup> round of Madrid Open

## Tennis

MADRID – Filipina star Alexandra Eala enjoyed a strong start to her Madrid Open campaign yesterday, moving past Russian qualifier Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova 6-3, 6-3 to reach the second round at the event for the third straight year.

The 44<sup>th</sup>-ranked lefty needed one hour and 31 minutes to dismiss Pavlyuchenkova, who was a semi-finalist in the Spanish capital in 2021.

The 34-year-old Pavlyuchenkova, a former French Open runner-up currently ranked 116 in the world, is 0-6 in tour-level main draw matches so far this season.

Eala saved all four break points she faced and broke Pavlyuchenkova twice in a tightly-contested 54-minute opening set.

The 20-year-old phenom briefly lost her advantage in the second set but swept eight points in a row to regain her lead and book a clash with 19<sup>th</sup> seed Elise Mertens.

"I feel really great. I love Madrid, it's an amazing tournament," said Eala, who has been training at the Rafa Nadal Academy in Mallorca for almost eight years.

"Every time I come here, I feel very comfortable, I feel like I'm at home."

Pavlyuchenkova, who was playing with a heavily-strapped right upper thigh, committed close to 40 unforced errors in what was her first meeting with Eala.

"Every match at this level is a battle, all of us players we fight until the end and she's been on the tour for many years. So I'm really happy with this win. She's a great player

and I'm really happy to be in the next round," Eala added.

In ATP action at the Caja Magica, 2021 Madrid finalist Matteo Berrettini crashed out to Croatian qualifier Dino Prizmic 6-3, 6-4.

"It's definitely a big thing for me and it's a pleasure to share the court with him," said the 20-year-old former Roland Garros junior champion. Prizmic will next take on American fourth seed Ben Shelton.

Meanwhile, former US Open champion Marin Cilic claimed his first Madrid Open win since 2022 with a hard-fought 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 performance against world number 44 Zizou Bergs.

It was the 37-year-old Croatian's first top-50 victory on clay in four years and it earned him a second-round meeting with Brazilian teenager Joao Fonseca. – AFP

# PGA Tour mulls pathway back for golfers as LIV plots survival

## Golf

### Andrew Marszal

LOS ANGELES – The PGA Tour is exploring pathways for players to return from LIV Golf, even as the embattled breakaway circuit scrambles to rebrand and retain its stars ahead of the rumoured withdrawal of Saudi funding.

The golfing world was shaken last week by widespread reports that LIV only has support from Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund guaranteed until the end of the season, after which the high-spending tour would face a major financial deficit if it continues.

That has prompted speculation that the entire circuit could soon collapse, leaving marquee players like Bryson DeChambeau plotting their futures.

Asked this week if the PGA tour had plans to welcome back defectors from rival LIV like DeChambeau, as it already has with five-time major winner Brooks Koepka, CEO Brian Rolapp said the PGA was "thinking about it."

"Brooks came back onto the tour because he made a phone call and said, 'Look, I'm out of my contract. I'm ready to come back,'" Rolapp told the Pat McAfee Show on Monday.

"So we're thinking about it. We'll react when we have an opportunity to react.

He added: "I'm interested in whatever makes the PGA Tour better."

Whether DeChambeau would want to return to the PGA Tour is not clear, particularly given the punitive financial terms already imposed on the likes of Koepka.

DeChambeau's wildly popular YouTube channel regularly draws over two million views per video, and he could feasibly choose to only play golf's four major tournaments.

Even if LIV Golf continues next season, DeChambeau's contract will be up, and *The Athletic* on Monday reported that the two-time major winner is demanding "up to US\$500 million" to re-sign.

LIV Golf CEO Scott O'Neil, who last week told staff that the tour would continue "full throttle"

this season, said the circuit would "probably" have to raise money going forward.

## 'OKGC'

One option he has frequently touted is selling equity stakes in LIV's 13 teams.

On Tuesday, the tour announced it was rebranding the Smash GC team – formerly captained by Koepka – as "OKGC", inspired by its new, Oklahoma City-native captain Talor Gooch.

It has previously rebranded other teams to help attract fans, sponsors and potential investors from specific international markets, including "Korean Golf Club", and the all-South African "Southern Guards".

The "OKGC" rebranding is "a significant step in LIV Golf's strategy to connect its teams to home markets, creating stronger identities and deeper relationships with fans, partners and communities," said a tour statement.

"As the league continues to grow globally, OKGC highlights the growing impact of localised, domestic team identities within the LIV Golf franchise model," said the statement.

Still, selling team stakes alone would not begin to plug the estimated US\$5 billion that Saudi backers have spent on the four-year-old LIV Golf tour to date.

In January, Bloomberg reported that the league was targeting valuations up to US\$300 million per team. There is currently no public valuation of what the teams are worth.

O'Neil has also spoken about other strategies like partnering with established national opens, and redoubling LIV's focus on markets where it has drawn record crowds to events, such as Australia and South Africa.

And in the United States, the tour still retains the support of at least one powerful fan.

The venue for LIV's next tournament?

The US president's own Trump National Golf Club, just outside Washington DC. – AFP

# 6<sup>th</sup> Asian Beach Games opens in Sanya



SANYA – The 6<sup>th</sup> Asian Beach Games opened yesterday evening in China's tropical resort city of Sanya, with the opening ceremony held at the seaside Yasha Park.

Chinese State Councilor Shen Yiqin declared the Games open after 45 delegations marched in for the continental event, which had originally been scheduled to take place in 2020.

The 75-minute ceremony was structured around three themed segments, "Passion of Sea and Sky," "Dreams of the Deep Blue" and "Connecting the World," highlighting ocean culture and the diversity of Asia.

After being postponed twice, chiefly due to the COVID-19

pandemic, the Sanya Games has attracted around 10,000 participants, including more than 1,600 athletes.

The Games marks the first time Hainan has hosted a continental-level beach sports event. It is also the first major international sporting event since the island-wide Hainan Free Trade Port was inaugurated last December.

"This is the moment Asia has been waiting for," said HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad Al Thani, President of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA). "And we do so in a nation whose record as a host of international sport is unrivalled."

"Few countries boast such a strong track record as China: having hosted the summer and winter Olympic

Games, countless Asian Games and many more. Tonight, we add the 6<sup>th</sup> Asian Beach Games Sanya 2026 to that proud legacy," he added.

On behalf of the OCA and all its 45 members, Sheikh Joaan also extended gratitude to the government of China, the city of Sanya and the Chinese Olympic Committee.

"These Games bring us together in a way only sport can," Sheikh Joaan said. "In Asia, our diversity is our greatest strength. Countless languages, traditions, and cultures. But our passion for sport unites us. Here, on this beach, we stand as one Asia. Together."

"The ceremony faces the sea, stands on the beach and looks up to the stars, breaking with traditional

concepts of large events," said Huang Peiling, chief director of the opening ceremony. "Instead of a conventional performance, the ceremony is designed to be immersive, allowing the audience to participate rather than simply watch."

The Games' mascot, the Eld's deer "Yaya," played a central role throughout the ceremony, appearing from beginning to end. "Unlike traditional mascots that mainly serve as symbols, 'Yaya' is designed as a key character linking the past, present and future of Sanya," said Qiao Wei, chief writer of the opening ceremony.

The flame-lighting ceremony featured a distinctive design, as six torchbearers approached from both sides of the "Ring of Sunshine"-

shaped stage and joined hands to ignite the flame, before the stage itself transformed into a cauldron, with the fire rising to illuminate the sea and sky.

The ceremony concluded with the theme song "See ya in Sanya," performed by 20 volunteers of the Games.

Scheduled from April 22 to 30, the Games feature 14 sports, 15 disciplines and 62 events. It is the second time China has hosted the Asian Beach Games, after the 2012 edition in Haiyang, Shandong Province.

China has sent a delegation of 255 members, including 171 athletes, to compete in 13 sports and 60 events, marking the country's highest participation in Asian Beach Games history. – Xinhua

Photos on page 16

## D4vd charged with murder after teen's body found in Tesla

Huw Griffith

LOS ANGELES – Singer D4vd has been charged with the murder and dismemberment of his young teenage girlfriend, whose decomposing corpse was found in a Tesla that had been abandoned in the Hollywood Hills.

The 21-year-old, whose real name is David Anthony Burke, faces a possible death penalty over the horrifying death of Celeste Rivas Hernández, whose body was discovered in September, within days of what would have been her 15<sup>th</sup> birthday.

“Celeste was just a child, under 14 years old, when David Burke allegedly engaged in repeated lewd and lascivious sexual relations with her,” Los Angeles District Attorney Nathan Hochman said.

“When she threatened to expose his criminal conduct and devastate his musical career, Burke allegedly murdered her, cut up her body and stuffed her body in two bags that were placed in the front trunk of his car.”

Hochman said Celeste's mutilated corpse sat rotting for four months until it was discovered.

“This horrific and gruesome murder committed by the charged sexual predator is shocking and appalling. To Celeste's loved ones: we will get the justice you seek and deserve.”

Burke shot to internet fame in 2022 when his song “Romantic Homicide” became a breakout hit on TikTok.

He was on a national tour when detectives were called to a Hollywood tow yard after neighbours complained of a terrible smell coming from an impounded vehicle.

The Tesla, which was registered to Burke in Texas, had been parked on the street in the upscale Hollywood Hills for around a month before it was towed.

But investigators believe Celeste's remains may have been in the front trunk for much longer.

“The condition of her remains delayed the medical examiner's ability to be able to determine cause of death,” Los Angeles police chief Jim McDonnell told the press conference.

“The substantial amount of time that passed between her death and the discovery meant that crucial evidence had degraded or disappeared.”

Burke faces one count each of murder, continuous sexual abuse of a child under the age of 14, and unlawful mutilation of human remains.

A lawyer entered not-guilty pleas on his behalf during a brief court appearance in Los Angeles on Monday.

Burke was ordered to appear in court again today. He remains in custody.

The artist's lawyers last week denied their client had killed the youngster.

“Let us be clear, the actual evidence in this case will show that David Burke did not murder Celeste Rivas Hernández, and he was not the cause of her death,” a statement from lawyers Blair Berk, Marilyn Bednarski, and Regina Peter said.

“We will vigorously defend David's innocence.”

Celeste, who lived in Lake Elsinore, east of Los Angeles, had been reported missing by her mother in 2024, at the age of 13.

Her mother told reporters that her daughter had a boyfriend named David.

Videos show Burke has a tattoo on one of his fingers matching the one reading “Shhh” that the Los Angeles County medical examiner previously revealed was on Celeste's index finger.

The pair were also seen on streaming websites together. – AFP



US singer D4vd, 21, whose real name is David Anthony Burke, attends his arraignment at Clara Shortridge Foltz Criminal Justice Centre in Los Angeles on Monday, when he was charged with the murder and dismemberment of a teenage girl whose decomposing body was found in an abandoned Tesla in the Hollywood Hills last September. – AFP

## Ziggy Stardust lives on at David Bowie London immersive

Helen Rowe

LONDON – Silhouetted against the light on stage in 1990, David Bowie belts out a deafening rendition of “Rebel Rebel” as a rapturous audience claps along with arms raised.

Rewind to 1973 and the iconic star is on stage at London's Hammersmith Odeon singing “Rock ‘n’ Roll Suicide” in his last show as Ziggy Stardust.

A decade after Bowie died in 2016 in New York at the age of 69, these are just some of the spellbinding moments captured in a new immersive, multi-media feature at London's Lightroom venue which opened yesterday.

The show features Bowie performing live, including previously unseen footage, alongside rarely heard interviews.

It is the latest project dedicated to the singer, widely considered one of the most influential artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

At the “cathedral-like” Lightroom, images and footage are projected on to 11-metre-high screens on all four walls as well as the floor.

Combined with a 360-degree sound system it's ideal for conveying Bowie's “genius as a live performer” and creating a sense of being there in the audience, according to writer and director Mark Grimmer.

“It's a social event. It's a crowd of people, you're there with other human beings”, Grimmer told AFP.

For the show, Grimmer and co-director Tom Wexler ploughed through countless hours of footage in the vast Bowie archive.

Highlights of “David Bowie: You're Not Alone” include the star's Hammersmith Odeon performance.

The concert famously featured in the DA Pennebaker film “Ziggy Stardust: The Motion Picture” (1983) which saw Bowie kill off the Ziggy persona.

### Icon and human being

Another highlight is a 1978 performance of “Heroes” at



Spectators attend the multimedia show ‘David Bowie: You're Not Alone’, showcasing work from the British musical legend, at the Lightroom venue in Kings Cross in London yesterday. – AFP

London's Earl's Court when Bowie “was really at the peak of his power,” Grimmer said.

Other footage includes Bowie at Live Aid in 1985 and performing “Starman” on the BBC chart programme Top of the Pops in 1972 dressed in a typically outlandish rainbow jumpsuit and boots.

Intercut with the footage is plenty of Bowie in his own words.

The singer, who had his first major hit with “Space Oddity” in 1969, describes the bleakness of his London childhood and his search for “colour, exhilaration” and a “way out”.

“I think one of the things that we wanted to do is to give an insight into Bowie the human being, as well as Bowie the icon”, said Grimmer.

After listening to some of the many interviews he gave, what emerged was a “very humorous and self-deprecating” character, he added.

Bowie laughs as he describes himself as an “unlikely” rock star, compares himself to an “emperor penguin” and admits to a burning curiosity about everything in life “except country and western [music], of course”.

Grimmer also focuses on Bowie's creative process which saw him endlessly reinvent himself.

### ‘Float on life’

Essentially a “shy person”, Bowie, whose birth name was David Jones, struggled with performing on stage in the early years.

To overcome his inhibitions he would immerse himself in the characters he created such as the androgynous alien rock star Ziggy Stardust sent to Earth before an apocalypse.

When all the “theatrics” were removed, Bowie said he was basically a writer who gravitated towards the isolated and freakish “not regular guys”.

“I'm a writer, that's what I do”, he said.

The hour-long show, which runs until at least October, features some 40 tracks by Bowie who sold at least 100 million records worldwide during his lifetime.

Reflecting on the ageing process, it draws to a close with him talking about his belief in an “energy form”.

“You float on life when you get older, you're not quite sure which way up it all is, which is not uncomfortable.”

“I'm quite happy in chaos,” he added, concluding that “life and the universe” were “really untidy”. – AFP

## Maker of Argentina's first Oscar-winning film, Luis Puenzo, dies at 80

BUENOS AIRES – The director of the first Argentine film to win an Oscar, Luis Puenzo, died on Tuesday aged 80, the main organisation representing Argentine creatives said Tuesday.

“With deep sorrow we bid farewell to the outstanding screenwriter, director, producer and partner in our organisation, Luis Puenzo, who passed away today in the city of Buenos Aires at the age of 80,” the General Society of Argentine Authors said in a statement.

No cause of death was given but Puenzo had been absent from public life for an extended period due to health issues.

His drama “The Official Story,” about the adoption by military families of children snatched from activists during Argentina's 1976-1983 dictatorship, won the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film in 1986.

He also directed the 1989 drama “Old Gringo” starring Jane Fonda as an American teacher who becomes swept up in the Mexican Revolution and “The Plague” (1992) based on the Albert Camus novel of the same title, starring William Hurt and Robert Duvall. – AFP



Argentine film director Luis Puenzo speaks during an interview with AFP after the screening of the remastered Argentine film La Historia Oficial, winner of the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film in 1986, in Buenos Aires on March 14, 2016. Puenzo, director of “La Historia Oficial”, the first Argentine film to win an Oscar, has died at the age of 80, the General Society of Authors (Argentores) announced on Tuesday. – AFP

### World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 13°C~25°C	Manila 23°C~35°C	New York 12°C~22°C	Lisbon 12°C~21°C
Shanghai 9°C~17°C	Bangkok 27°C~35°C	London 5°C~19°C	Rio de Janeiro 19°C~26°C
Hong Kong 20°C~28°C	Tokyo 12°C~20°C	Frankfurt 5°C~21°C	Luanda 25°C~29°C
Taipei 19°C~29°C	Singapore 25°C~33°C	Vancouver 7°C~15°C	Maputo 18°C~23°C
Guangzhou 17°C~22°C	Kuala Lumpur 25°C~34°C	Paris 7°C~22°C	Dili 25°C~30°C
Nanjing 7°C~16°C	Jakarta 24°C~33°C	Moscow 0°C~6°C	São Tomé 26°C~32°C
Guilin 13°C~25°C	Seoul 9°C~24°C	Las Vegas 13°C~26°C	Praia 19°C~27°C
Xi'an 11°C~24°C	Sydney 15°C~22°C	Monte Carlo 12°C~19°C	Bissau 21°C~38°C



Abdelwadod Faris Mahmoud Ananzeh (second left) of Jordan competes during the beach handball men's preliminary round group B match against Thailand at the 6th Asian Beach Games in Sanya, Hainan Province, on Tuesday. - Xinhua

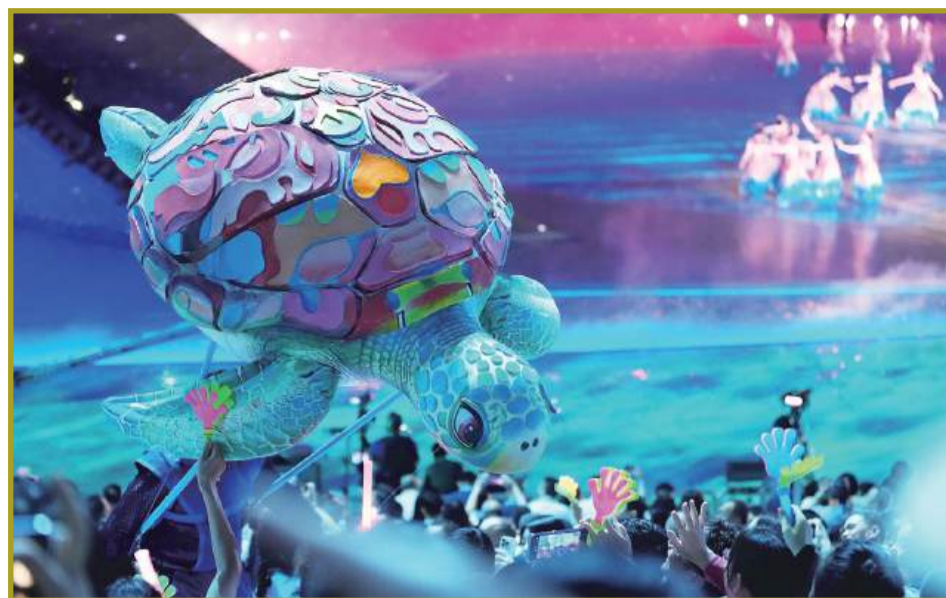


Photo taken yesterday shows a scene of the opening ceremony of the 6th Asian Beach Games in Sanya, Hainan Province. - Xinhua

An artiste performs during the opening ceremony of the 6th Asian Beach Games in Sanya, Hainan Province, yesterday. - Xinhua



The cauldron is lit during the opening ceremony of the 6th Asian Beach Games in Sanya, Hainan Province, yesterday. - Xinhua



Members of the delegation of Macao parade during the opening ceremony of the 6th Asian Beach Games in Sanya, Hainan Province, yesterday. - Xinhua



Pittayaporn Kwantongtanaree (left) of Thailand vies with Yana Smolina of Kazakhstan during the water polo women's round-robin final match between Kazakhstan and Thailand at the 6th Asian Beach Games in Sanya, Hainan Province, yesterday. - Xinhua