

Sam, Spanish 2nd deputy PM vow deeper cooperation

Tony Wong

Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai, who was on the last day of his three-day working visit to Spain yesterday, paid a courtesy call on Second Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Labour and Social Economy Yolanda Díaz Pérez in Madrid yesterday morning, where both sides exchanged views on expanding cooperation between Macau and Spain in the economy and trade, tourism, education, and science and technology, according to a statement released by the Macau Government Information Bureau (GCS) last night (Macau time).

During the meeting, according to the statement, Sam noted that this year marks the 27th anniversary of Macau's return to the motherland. As the first to pay a visit to Spain in the capacity as the MSAR's chief executive, Sam said he feels deeply honoured, describing the trip as a significant milestone. Sam noted that China and Spain have had diplomatic relations for 53 years, and have maintained close diplomatic ties since establishing a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2005. With recent visits to China by Spain's King Felipe VI and Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, both countries have agreed on an action plan in order to further strengthen bilateral relations in the coming years, Sam noted.

Sam underlined that since its return to the motherland in 1999, Macau has steadfastly implemented



Spanish Second Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Labour and Social Economy Yolanda Díaz Pérez (left) shakes hands with Macau Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai on the sidelines of their meeting in Madrid yesterday morning (local time). – Photo: GCS

the principles of “One Country, Two Systems”, “Macau people governing Macau”, and a high degree of autonomy. Macau's way of life remains unchanged, enjoying executive, legislative, independent judicial and final adjudication

powers, Sam noted, adding that the coexistence of different systems and deep integration of Chinese and Western cultures has created a unique, harmonious and inclusive environment. During the meeting, Sam invited Díaz to visit Macau to

experience it firsthand, according to the statement.

During the meeting, Sam also said that Macau and Spain share many similarities in language, legal systems, history and culture, offering strong potential for deeper

connections. By bringing to Spain a delegation of businesspeople from Macau, Hengqin, and various other places in the Chinese mainland, Sam said, the MSAR government aimed to enhance economic and trade exchanges between Macau and Spain, including strengthening cooperation in the conference, exhibition and tourism industries, and promoting mutual support, complementary advantages, and shared development.

In addition, given Spain's strong scientific and technological capabilities and rich higher-education resources – as well as existing solid academic exchanges with Macau – both sides can jointly advance research and innovation, commercialisation of scientific research outcomes, and the training of future talent in science and technology, Sam said.

Continued on p.5



Bolivia, Chile move to restore ties severed 50 years ago

SANTIAGO DE CHILE – The foreign ministers of Chile and Bolivia met yesterday in a step toward restoring relations severed 50 years ago, the latter's foreign minister said.

These two countries severed ties in 1975 after failing to reach agreement on a long-standing beef for landlocked Bolivia: access to

the Pacific Ocean.

Bolivia used to have a coast but lost it in a war with Chile in the late 19th century. Regaining this access has been a key goal of Bolivia for decades.

Every year Bolivia celebrates a holiday called Día del Mar, or Day of the Sea, to remember the loss of its 400-km stretch of coastline to

Chile in the conflict known as the War of the Pacific.

Yesterday foreign ministers Francisco Pérez Mackenna of Chile and Fernando Aramayo of Bolivia met at a border crossing and travelled together to La Paz.

Aramayo told reporters the meeting was “a fundamental milestone” on the road to

restoring relations.

Ties between the two former enemies are warming now that centre-right President Rodrigo Paz governs in Bolivia and far right President José Kast recently took power in Chile.

A key focus for Chile is to crack down on illegal immigration across its northern border with Bolivia,

one of the poorest countries in South America. Chile is one of the most developed.

Kast, who took power March 11, ordered the digging of a three-metre deep ditch along the frontier to make it harder for people to sneak into Chile. Bolivia has not publicly objected to this project.

– AFP

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The Macau Post Daily

China to invest 1 billion yuan to subsidize tourist trips

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism yesterday announced an investment of more than 1 billion yuan to subsidize travel-related spending during a month-long tourism promotion campaign. – Story on p. 6

Trump orders Iran mine-layers sunk, as Iran tolls tankers

President Donald Trump ordered the US Navy yesterday to destroy any Iranian boat caught laying mines in the Strait of Hormuz, putting more pressure on a fraying ceasefire as disruption from the Gulf stand-off battered the world economy. – Story on p. 10

Pope Leo ends Africa visit with open-air Mass in Equatorial Guinea

Pope Leo XIV yesterday held an open-air Mass in Equatorial Guinea in front of tens of thousands of followers, wrapping up his first major international tour that began with harsh criticism of his stance on Iran from US President Donald Trump. – Story on p. 12

2026 Tap Siac Craft Market opens

Khalel Vallo

The 2026 Tap Siac Craft Market opened in the eponymous square yesterday, launching a two-week programme featuring hundreds of creative stalls and cross-regional participation. It is a cultural and creative market that has been held annually in the spring and autumn since 2008.

Organised by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), the market's first phase runs through this Sunday, while the second phase runs from next Thursday through next Sunday, May 3, featuring a raft of music performances and creative handicrafts.

On both weeks, the market will run from 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. on Thursday and Friday, while the weekends will run from 3 p.m. to 10 p.m.



Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) Vice President Cheang Kai Meng delivers a speech at the opening ceremony of the 2026 Tap Siac Craft Market. — Photos: Khalel Vallo

Addressing the opening ceremony, Cheang Kai Meng, vice president of the bureau, said that “the annual spring ‘Tap Siac Craft

Market’ kicks off today [yesterday] and will run for two consecutive weeks. Cultural and creative practitioners from Macau, joined by industry friends from the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong, [China’s] Taiwan [region], and neighbouring regions, have come together to showcase a diverse array of original products”.

Cheang added that the event includes handicraft workshops and live music performances, inviting residents and tourists to experience Macau’s creative atmosphere, noting that since its launch in 2008, the market has served as a platform for nurturing local creative brands.

“In order to further expand the brand presence of the ‘Tap Siac Craft Market’ in Asia and forge a wider circle of partnerships



Fairgoers check out stalls at the craft market in Praça do Tap Siac yesterday.

through the power of culture, we are leveraging this gathering of creative talents from various districts in Macau to host brand matching activities. By establishing a business-orientated exchange platform, we empower the industry to promote Macau’s original brands to industry practitioners from various regions and local event organisers”, he said, highlighting efforts to expand the market’s regional reach through business matching and collaboration.

The market features a wide range of handmade and original products from jewellery, key rings, books and fridge magnets, alongside workshops and performances aimed at enhancing visitor engagement.

Running across two weekends, the Tap Siac Craft Market remains one of Macau’s major cultural and creative events, offering a platform for original brands while encouraging public participation in the city’s evolving creative scene. ■

Local lorry driver faces fine after hitting underpass roof

Armando Neves

A local lorry driver has been fined after crashing into the roof of an underpass in Zape yesterday morning, a Public Security Police (PSP) spokesperson confirmed.

The driver, a local man in his forties surnamed Chan, was travelling through the Avenida do Dr. Rodrigo Rodrigues underpass when the accident occurred at about 11 a.m.

Upon arrival, PSP officers found the lorry wedged inside the underpass with debris and the lorry’s roof strewn across the road. The driver subsequently passed a breathalyser test.

According to police, the vehicle first struck a height

restriction sign at the underpass entrance before colliding with the ceiling. A structural inspection confirmed the underpass was not damaged, and the lorry was eventually removed by a crane.

Chan was found to have violated Article 5 of Macau’s Road Traffic Regulation for failing to adhere to warning signs, an offence carrying a fine of between 300 and 1,500 patacas.

Additionally, he was cited under Article 30 of the Road Traffic Law, which requires drivers to regulate their speed based on road conditions, vehicle characteristics, and load to avoid foreseeable obstacles. This breach carries a further fine of 300 patacas. ■



This image of a screenshot from a video posted on Facebook yesterday shows a lorry wedged inside the underpass and the roof of the lorry lying on the road. The Post cannot vouch for the authenticity of the video grab.

South Shore green promenade Zone 2 opens

Khalel Vallo

Zone 2 of the second phase of the South Shore Waterfront Green Promenade opened yesterday, the Macau Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) announced in a statement, providing a new coastline leisure space between Macau Tower and the Gate of Understanding in Nam Van.

The 2nd phase of the promenade is being developed in three zones, with Zone 1 having opened in November last year, the statement noted, adding that the newly opened Zone 2 covers a 17,000-square-metre waterfront strip, offering a long, narrow recreational space for the public.

The zone features a seafront trail and a cycle track of more than 600 metres, separated by landscaped green belts, the statement underlined, adding that various plant species, including golden shower trees, garlic vines and Indian Putat trees, have been introduced to enhance the scenery and provide shaded leisure areas.

Additional facilities include waterfront steps, seating areas and a fishing platform near the approach viaduct of Sai Van Bridge, offering views of the coast, the statement noted.

Existing sports facilities such as basketball and badminton courts have been retained, alongside newly added chess tables and green recreational spaces catering to both



This undated handout photo provided by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) yesterday shows Zone 2 of the second phase of the South Shore Waterfront Green Promenade on the coastline between Macau Tower and the Gate of Understanding monument in Sai Van.

active and passive leisure activities, according to the statement. At this stage, visitors may use their own bicycles on the cycle track, the statement said, underlining that a bicycle rental service may be considered once the whole promenade project is completed.

The public can access the zone via the Gate of Understanding monument, a footbridge along Avenida Panorâmica do Lago Sai Van, or pedestrian crossings near parking areas under Sai Van Bridge, the statement said, noting that the second phase of the promenade stretches from Governador Nobre

de Carvalho Bridge to the Gate of Understanding, covering a total construction area of about 60,000 square metres. While Zones 1 and 2 are now open, work on Zone 3 began late last year, the statement pointed out.

All construction work for the second phase is expected to be completed in the first half of next year, the statement said, concluding that the project aims to create a multi-functional recreational space designed around parent-child play, leisure and waterfront scenery, while enhancing Macau’s coastal landscape. ■

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Macau Weather

TEMPERATURE FALLING. OVERCAST. SHOWERS, HEAVY AT TIMES. A FEW THUNDERSTORMS. FORCE 3 TO 4 NORTH TO NORTHEASTERLY WINDS WITH GUSTS. RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 80% AND 99%.

18°C~22°C

Source: SMG

Macau feature film 'The Violin Case' set for May 15 premiere at Studio City

Rui Pastorin

Max Bessmertny's feature film "The Violin Case" is set to make its Macau premiere at Studio City Cinema in Cotai on May 15, while it will be shown by other local cinemas from May 22, according to a statement last night from the team.

The premiere is venue-sponsored by Studio City Macau.

Being six years in the making since its conception during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the film features a multicultural cast and is primarily in English, though it also uses Cantonese and Portuguese. The movie is inspired by a true event that happened to Bessmertny's father, artist Konstantin Bessmertny, when he lost his violin artwork in a foreign city 10 years ago, remaining unfound to this day despite efforts by the father and son.

Taking Macau as its backdrop, the film then takes this concept to tell its story, where a foreign painter, played by Kelsey Wilhelm, embarks on a desperate search for a violin artwork, his most valuable piece, that was left in the back of a cab. What follows is "the worst night of his life", the statement said. The main cast also includes Filipe Baptista Tou, Mi

Lee, and Clara Brito, who plays a "calculating art gallerist".

The statement added that Bessmertny and producer Virginia Ho took the movie to 10 film markets and festivals from Cannes to Tokyo in 2025 as part of an initiative sponsored by the Cultural Development Fund to promote the film and gain insight into the film industry.

The statement added that the project, which was almost never made, was "supported entirely by film lovers and patrons of the arts and the project was funded individually through every step of the entire production cycle".

Following its Macau premiere, the statement noted that the indie film will also be screened at Museu do Oriente ("Museum of the Orient") in Lisbon on September 11 as part of a series of international events showcasing the film, being set to mark the first "Made in Macau" film to debut in the country.

It will also be part of screenings, festivals and workshops, among other activities in markets like Hong Kong and other parts of Asia, along with Europe and the US.

The trailer is available on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7QbjAfSo-bY> ■

Zhou Enlai exhibition aims to foster patriotism, love for Macau



A passer-by is looking at the open-air exhibition about Zhou Enlai, the first premier of the PRC, in Iao Hon Park yesterday.

— Photos: Armindo

Armindo Neves

Nam Kwong (Group) Company Limited yesterday hosted the opening ceremony of an exhibition dedicated to Zhou Enlai, the first premier of the People's Republic of China (PRC).

The event is being held in conjunction with the Macau Cultural Promotion Association, the Zhou Enlai and Deng Yingchao Research Centre, and the Zhou Enlai and Deng Yingchao Memorial Hall. Both the research centre and memorial hall are located in Tianjin.

According to a statement by the association, the ceremony took place at Iao Hon Market, with the open-air exhibition being held in the adjacent Iao Hon Park. It will remain open to the public until Monday.

Song Xiaodong, chairman of the association, noted in his speech that the exhibition – timed to coincide with World Book and Copyright Day on April 23 – aims to encourage local citizens, particularly young people, to revisit Zhou's aspiration to "study for the rise of China", thereby fostering a sense of patriotism and national commitment.

Ma Zhonggeng, deputy director

of the memorial hall, added that the event serves to strengthen the younger generation's dedication to patriotism and their love for Macau. He noted that the exhibition provides a significant spiritual boost, supporting Macau's long-term prosperity and stability through education.

Zhou Enlai (周恩来) served as the first premier of the PRC from 1949 until his death in 1976, aged 77. One of the pivotal leaders of the Communist Party of China (CPC), he was renowned for his diplomatic acumen, playing a major role in the Korean War armistice and the 1972 China visit of US President Richard Nixon. Zhou was also instrumental in managing China's economic reconstruction and remained a widely respected, moderate, and pragmatic figure throughout his long tenure at the helm of the Central People's Government.

Deng Yingchao (鄧穎超) was a prominent Chinese revolutionary, politician, and women's rights advocate who played a significant role in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) for over six decades. She served as chairwoman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC)



Photo of Zhou Enlai shown at the exhibition.

from 1983 to 1988. She passed away in 1992, aged 88.

Meanwhile, the opening ceremony also included a prize-giving session for an essay competition, the statement, adding that participants were required to express in writing their admiration for Zhou, their reflections on the journey of China's national rejuvenation, and their deep understanding of how Macau and the motherland share the same destiny, "breathing together and standing united". ■



This image provided by "The Violin Case" team yesterday shows a still from the movie.

'10 Minutes of Reading' incentive scheme starts today

Armindo Neves

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) held the opening ceremony at the Macau Cultural Centre (CCM) yesterday for an event titled "Macau Just Read – National Reading Campaign Week".

The bureau also announced the launch of its inaugural incentive scheme, "10 Minutes of Reading", which begins today. According to the event's website, participants can earn points simply by reading for 10 minutes each day, which can then be exchanged for prizes.

Those looking for more detailed information about the event may visit the link: <https://www.library.gov.mo/nationalreadingcampaignweek/zh-hant/active/10mins-reading>

The ceremony was held in conjunction with the Education

and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) and the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS). Guests included Bai Bing, deputy director of the Department of Publicity and Culture of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government; Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Wallis O Lam; and Macau medal-winning paddler Zhu Yuling, currently ranked fourth in the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) World Ranking (Women's Singles), who is serving as the brand ambassador for "10 Minutes of Reading".

In her speech, IC President Deland Leong Wai Man said that the National Reading Campaign Week has been optimised by the bureau as a brand-new cultural initiative to help establish Macau as a "City of Reading".

She noted that the bureau has established "10-Minute Reading Corners" at five locations, including the lobby of the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre, the leisure area on Rua do General Ivens Ferraz, and the Macau Cultural Centre.

Leong added that over 100 activities will be held during the event, including a book exchange, a sale of periodicals, and a family carnival at the Macau Cultural Centre over the weekend.

Furthermore, Leong remarked that the event has strengthened regional cooperation. This includes the "Read Together for Half an Hour" initiative, jointly organised by seven major cities, including Guangzhou, Hong Kong, Nanning and Shenzhen

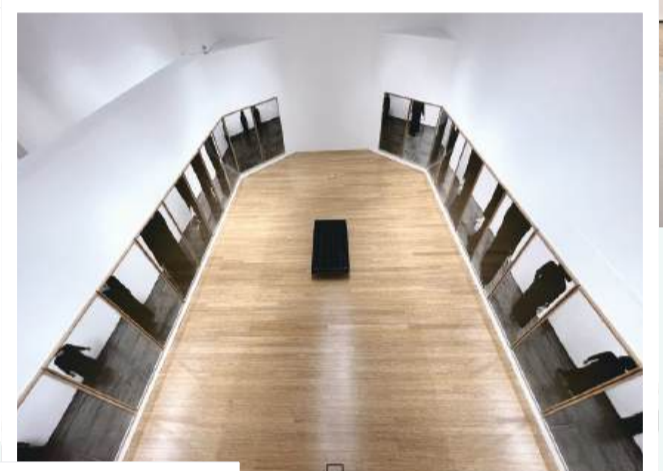
with shared reading sites now extended to the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin.

The two-day carnival will be held tomorrow and Sunday. The reading week, which started on Monday, ends this Sunday. ■



This undated handout photo provided the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) yesterday shows students reading at the bureau's "10-Minute Reading Corners" set up outside the Macau Cultural Centre.

Helena Almeida's retrospective exhibition now in its final 3 days



Rui Pastorin

The first major retrospective in Asia of the works of prominent Portuguese artist Helena Almeida (1934 – 2018) will come to a close on Sunday after its three-month showcase at the Macau Museum of Art (MAM), with members of the public still able to view a raft of works until then.

Although Almeida passed away back in 2018, the Lisbon-born artist's influence remains, having been a prominent figure in Portuguese and international contemporary art.

With an extensive career, Almeida studied painting at the Lisbon School of Fine Arts, and by the late 1960s, photography became her main medium, according to a statement displayed at the venue. She was the daughter of sculptor Leopoldo de Almeida, who also had an impact on her and her work, the statement highlighted.

Her first solo exhibition in 1967 at Galeria Bucholz in Lisbon marked the beginning of her experimental artistic exploration and by 1969, a signature part of her work emerged where she incorporated herself into her images and using the body as a medium. She entered major exhibitions while her works have been collected by leading institutions.

Held across three floors in two sections, the retrospective, titled "Helena Almeida: I Am Here – Presence and Resonance", showcases 190 of Almeida's artworks in her section titled "Presence", including black and white photography, final sketch studies and preparatory sketches in chronological order based on her extensive career. Sections

featuring videos of Almeida throughout her life are also found.

"The show highlights Almeida's exploration of the body, space, resilience, and impermanence, often in collaboration with her partner Artur Rosa", who was a sculptor and architect, as noted in the information at the museum. Rosa passed away in 2020.

Chief curator Delfim Sardo described the exhibition in a curator's statement at the museum as being "one of the most comprehensive perspectives of Helena Almeida's works", presenting key moments of her career in chronological order. "It aims to offer a broad reading of the unique relationship between bodily performativity and the practice of self-representation that designs her oeuvre".

A dedicated section "Resonance" features works by several female artists from Macau and the Chinese mainland, being inspired by Almeida.

One can catch the showcase of Almeida's work, alongside those created by other artists, through Sunday, with the museum open from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., with the last entry at 6:30 p.m.



These photos mainly show the works created by Helena Almeida in the section "Presence" of the exhibition "Helena Almeida: I Am Here – Presence and Resonance".
 – Photos taken yesterday at the Macau Museum of Art (MAM) by Rui Pastorin

Sam, Spanish 2nd deputy PM vow deeper cooperation

Continued from p.1

During the meeting, according to the statement, Díaz welcomed Sam and his delegation to Spain. She acknowledged Macau's long-standing efforts in establishing itself as a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure, where numerous international conferences, exhibitions and forums are held every year, in which Spanish enterprises have also participated. Díaz said she believes such exchanges would bring the two sides even closer in the future.

Díaz also said that Sam's visit presented an important opportunity to further strengthen high-level official exchanges and people-to-people cooperation between Spain and Macau. Leveraging the comprehensive strategic partnership between China and Spain, she said, Macau can better utilise its unique advantages to deepen multilateral collaboration with Spain in economy and trade, tourism, culture, education, and technology, adding that this will inject new momentum into Sino-Spanish friendship and Macau's high-quality development.

Díaz also thanked Sam for the invitation to Macau and expressed an interest in visiting Macau in the future to see its achievements firsthand.

Reception in Madrid

Meanwhile, during a reception hosted by the MSAR government in Madrid on Wednesday evening (local time), Sam delivered a speech underlining that expanding cooperation with Spanish-speaking countries is part of the MSAR government's strategic development effort.

Sam noted that the MSAR



Macau Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai (right) shakes hands with Second Vice President of the Senate of Spain Concepción Andreu Rodríguez on the sidelines of their meeting at a hotel in Madrid on Wednesday afternoon (local time), before they addressed a reception hosted by the MSAR government at the hotel. — Photo: GCS

government and the executive committee of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin jointly established the Service Centre for Economy and Trade between China and Portuguese/Spanish-speaking Countries in 2025, as well as a one-billion yuan development fund for promoting trade between China and Portuguese/Spanish-speaking countries, with the aim of extending Macau's role as a China-Portuguese-speaking countries' platform into the Spanish-speaking world.

According to a GCS statement released in the early hours of yesterday (Macau time), Sam noted in his speech that Macau has been an important window for exchanges and mutual learning between Chinese and Western civilisations, and has maintained close and friendly ties with the West, particularly European countries including Spain.

Sam also underlined Macau's commitment to becoming an important place for countries around the world, including Spain, to benefit from China's rapid development.

Also delivering a speech during the reception, Second Vice President of the Senate of Spain Concepción Andreu Rodríguez said that both Spain and China share a strong desire to strengthen cooperation, adding that bilateral relations are at their best level in history.

Andreu also praised China's remarkable achievements in the development of high technology, particularly in the rapid development of new-energy vehicles (NEVs) and energy storage, which has amazed the world, she said.

Andreu also acknowledged Macau's vibrant and promising economic development, adding that both Spain and Macau are renowned world-class tourist destinations.

According to the statement, five cooperation agreements between Macau and Spain were signed during the reception.

Sam meets Spanish 2nd deputy speaker

Meanwhile, before the reception, Sam and Andreu held a meeting where they exchanged views on enhancing economic and trade ties and tourism cooperation between Macau and Spain, according to a separate GCS statement released in the early hours of yesterday (Macau time).

Sam said during the meeting that the MSAR government is vigorously advancing Macau's appropriate economic diversification, expressing hope that, with strong support from Spanish authorities, enterprises from the Chinese mainland, Macau, and Spain can enhance long-term exchanges and cooperation for mutual benefit.

Andreu said during the meeting that Spain, as the world's second-largest tourist destination, has developed diverse and mature tourism models, and is ready to share experiences with Macau to boost bilateral economic development through enhanced collaboration.

Sam meets Chinese ambassador to Spain & Andorra

Meanwhile, Sam also met with Chinese Ambassador to Spain and Andorra Yao Jing in Madrid at noon on Wednesday (local time), where they exchanged views on topics such as bolstering tourism and economic cooperation between Macau and Spain, and

extending Macau's role as a China-Portuguese-speaking countries' platform into the Spanish-speaking world, according to a separate GCS statement released in the early hours of yesterday (Macau time).

During the meeting, Sam briefed Yao about the important functions played by the Service Centre for Economy and Trade between China and Portuguese/Spanish-speaking Countries in Hengqin in helping enterprises in the respective countries establish a presence in Macau or Hengqin.

Yao also said that, building on its well-established role as a platform for China-Portuguese-speaking countries' cooperation, Macau can further extend its influence to Spanish-speaking nations, leveraging Spain as a gateway to Spanish-speaking Latin American countries and other Spanish-speaking nations.

Meanwhile, a business and investment promotion conference for enterprises from Macau, the Chinese mainland and Spain was held in Madrid on Wednesday afternoon (local time), where 43 business cooperation agreements were signed between enterprises from Spain and China comprising those from Macau and the Chinese mainland including Hengqin.

During a press briefing in Madrid on Wednesday night (local time), Sam noted that a total of 48 business cooperation agreements were signed in Madrid during the MSAR delegation's visit.

According to previous announcements, a total of 61 business cooperation agreements were signed in Lisbon during the MSAR delegation's visit there. ■

Sam pledges strengthening cooperation with Spanish-speaking countries

MADRID – Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai said on Wednesday that expanding cooperation with Spanish-speaking countries is a strategic priority for the region, pledging to extend the functions of Macao's platform for cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking countries to Spanish-speaking countries.

Sam made the remarks at a reception in Madrid hosted by the Macao SAR government.

He noted that Macao has long maintained close links with European countries, including Spain, and will further deepen cooperation in trade, culture, tourism, and conventions and exhibitions with these countries, while enhancing people-to-people exchanges.

Sam said China's upcoming 15th Five-Year Plan will outline the country's development blueprint for the next five years, providing broad prospects for China-Spain cooperation. Macao

is aligning with the plan and formulating its own third five-year development plan to improve external cooperation mechanisms and build a platform for shared development opportunities.

Concepción Andreu Rodríguez, second vice president of the Spanish Senate, said both Spain and China share a strong desire to strengthen cooperation, and bilateral relations are maintaining sound momentum.

She noted that China has made notable progress in areas such as technological innovation, while Macao's economy shows strong vitality and potential. Spain and Macao, both major tourist destinations, have promising prospects for cooperation in culture, tourism, and the conventions and exhibitions sectors.

More than 300 representatives from the Macao SAR government, business circles and Spanish economic and commercial sectors attended the event.

— Xinhua

New central library ready in 2028: culture chief

Staff Reporter

Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) President Deland Leong Wai Man said yesterday that the ongoing construction of the government's new central library is expected to be completed in 2028.

Leong made the remarks while speaking to reporters at the Macau Cultural Centre (CCM) in Nape yesterday on the sidelines of the launch ceremony of the local edition of the National Reading Campaign Week.

The new central library is being built on the site where the long-defunct Hotel Estoril once stood, opposite Praça do Tap Siac.

The project is being carried out in two phases. The first phase got off the ground in June 2024 and was completed in December last year, comprising the demolition of the former Hotel Estoril, and the new library building's pile foundation and basement work.

After the first phase's completion in December last year, the central library project's second phase, namely superstructure work, got off the ground last month and is scheduled to be completed in March 2028, according to the website of the Public Works Bureau (DSOP).

Speaking to reporters yesterday, Leong underlined that the construction of the new central library "is



A taxi is driven past the construction site of the ongoing new central library project on Avenida de Sidónio Pais yesterday. — Photo: Armindo Neves

proceeding steadily and on schedule", adding that the construction is expected to be completed in 2028.

Leong did not mention when exactly the new central library is expected to open.

Leong also noted that the new central library is designed for all ages, featuring facilities specially designed for children, teenagers, adults, and senior citizens respectively.

According to the DSOP website, the central library project's first phase was carried out by Ming Shun Construction and Property Investment Limited with a price tag of 69.78 million patacas, while the

project's ongoing second phase is currently being carried out by J&T Construction Company Limited with a price tag of 343.888 million patacas.

After the scheduled completion of its construction in March 2028, the new library building will be transferred to the Cultural Affairs Bureau, which will then carry out the building's internal decoration, install equipment and facilities, and supply the new library with books.

Consequently, the construction of the new central library is scheduled to cost 413.668 million patacas in total, not including the building's internal decoration. ■

China's navy a solid force for maritime security and peace



A Taiwan compatriot poses for a photo with a People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy officer while visiting a warship in Qingdao, Shandong Province, yesterday. A group of Taiwan compatriots yesterday attended an open-day event celebrating the 77th anniversary of the founding of the PLA Navy in Qingdao. They boarded active-duty warships open to the public and learned about the ships' weapons and equipment, as well as the work and daily life of the officers and crew. — Xinhua

Commentary

BEIJING — On the 77th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy, it is essential to recognize this force not merely for its development, but also for its important and growing role as a guardian of world peace and a provider of maritime public security services.

China has adhered to a path of peaceful development and a national defense policy that is defensive in nature, championing the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security. Within this framework, the navy plays a vital role in maintaining maritime order and security.

In a turbulent world marked by intensifying geopolitical conflicts, the Chinese navy has consistently promoted peace, cooperation and friendship. This can be manifested by the concrete actions of the Chinese navy over the years.

One of the most notable examples is Chinese anti-piracy escort missions in the Gulf of Aden and off the coast of Somalia. Since 2008, Chinese naval ships deployed to these regions have carried out regular protection operations, benefiting more than 7,300 Chinese and foreign ships. This underscores the role of the Chinese navy in protecting critical international trade routes.

Besides security operations, the Chinese navy has played an active part in international efforts aimed at emergency evacuations and disaster relief. For example, Chinese naval ships participated in evacuations of Chinese citizens and foreign nationals from some war-torn countries. They have also delivered aid to multiple countries hit by natural disasters.

Humanitarian medical services, notably, have become a hallmark of the Chinese navy. China's naval hospital ships have visited more than 50 countries and regions and provided health services to around 400,000 people. These efforts have been widely welcomed by local populations, serving as acts and symbols of peace, friendship and goodwill.

The Chinese navy has also expanded its international engagement through port visits and joint exercises. The Chinese navy has hosted over 300 foreign naval delegations, and its vessels have visited more than 90 countries. Joint exercises and training operations have enhanced mutual trust and operational cooperation. Such exchanges help contribute to a more stable maritime security environment.

The Chinese navy will continue to actively shoulder its international responsibilities, safeguard the security of international waterways,

and provide more public goods for maritime security.

Oceans are vital to human survival and development and connect peoples of different countries into a community with a shared future. The activities and missions of the Chinese navy align with China's initiatives and visions, including the Belt and Road Initiative that aims to promote connectivity, cooperation and exchange, along with the joint building of a maritime community with a shared future.

While resolutely safeguarding China's sovereignty, security and development interests, the Chinese military remains a staunch force for world peace and makes its contributions to the building of a community with a shared future for humanity.

With mankind facing complex challenges, the need for cooperation has never been greater. Countries should strengthen dialogue and exchange on maritime affairs, deepen practical cooperation between navies, and pursue a win-win path of maritime security for global peace and prosperity.

As the Chinese navy celebrates its 77th anniversary, the message is clear and consistent: China seeks harmony, not hegemony, and cooperation, not confrontation. China always stands as a reliable contributor to world peace and shared prosperity. — Xinhua

China urges US to stop supporting Taiwan region in consolidating so-called 'diplomatic allies'

BEIJING — A foreign ministry spokesperson yesterday urged the United States to stop supporting the Taiwan region in consolidating its so-called "diplomatic allies" and stop sending any wrong signals to "Taiwan independence" separatist forces.

Spokesperson Guo Jiakun made the remarks at a daily press briefing, after the US made an erroneous statement regarding the "temporary delay" of the planned visit to Eswatini by Taiwan leader Lai Ching-te.

There is but one China in the world, and Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory, said Guo. The one-China principle is a basic norm in international relations and a prevailing consensus in

the world. It is where the public opinion trends and the arc of history bends, and the right thing to do, Guo added.

It is fully just for China to defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity, and for relevant countries to safeguard the one-China principle, said Guo.

He pointed out the US's irresponsible accusations are nothing but a mischaracterization of the facts and truth. China firmly opposes it and will never accept it.

China urges the US to abide by the one-China principle and the three China-US joint communiqués, and stop using the Taiwan question to interfere in China's internal affairs, Guo added. — Xinhua

China plays key role in global geoparks network, supports international development: UNESCO official

Interview

PARIS — China plays a leading role in the UNESCO Global Geoparks Network (GGN) and is increasingly contributing its experience to other countries, a UNESCO official has told Xinhua.

In an interview with Xinhua on Wednesday, Kristof Vandenberghe, chief of the Section for Earth Sciences and Geoparks at UNESCO, highlighted China's strong domestic system and growing international outreach in this regard. He also expressed hope that China could support and help train neighboring countries and African nations in developing geoparks.

UNESCO yesterday officially approved the inclusion of 12 new geoparks in its GGN, including Changshan UNESCO Global Geopark in Zhejiang Province and Mount Siguniang UNESCO Global Geopark in Sichuan Province. With these additions, China now has 51 geoparks in the network, maintaining its position as the country with the largest number worldwide.

Launched in 2015, the UNESCO Global Geoparks program brings together sites of geological heritage of international significance, combining conservation, environmental education and sustainable development, while supporting indigenous peoples and local communities.

According to UNESCO, there are now 241 UNESCO Global Geoparks across 51 countries. China alone accounts for 51 of them. He said that China has led the development of geoparks from an early stage and continues to set the pace.

"Actually, China is one of the few countries where the concept of

geoparks and the protection of geo-heritage are built into national law. They developed the national law for rural development, to promote tourism towards more remote areas. And now it gives people not only pride and purpose, but also revenue," Vandenberghe said, adding that this was precisely the original goal behind the geopark concept.

Zhangjiajie UNESCO Global Geopark, known for its unique landscapes, attracts international visitors and inspired scenes in the film Avatar, he said.

Beyond its domestic achievements, China is also sharing its expertise internationally. Vandenberghe said many countries in Asia learn from Chinese experts, noting that the China University of Geosciences in Beijing organizes an intensive geopark training course each year. Chinese experts also take part in UNESCO revalidation missions around the world.

"They bring their expertise from China to geoparks in Latin America, in Europe and in Asia. They promote the model, they promote the idea, they promote their expertise," he said.

At the same time, he pointed out that some Chinese geoparks face the challenge of "overtourism," as certain sites are fragile and require careful assessment of their carrying capacity to balance conservation and tourism.

Vandenberghe called for China to support and help train countries such as Pakistan, Laos, Cambodia and Mongolia, which have yet to establish geoparks. He also called for stronger cooperation between China and Africa, noting that there is currently only one geopark in sub-Saharan Africa. — Xinhua

China to invest 1 billion yuan to subsidize tourist trips

BEIJING — The Ministry of Culture and Tourism yesterday announced an investment of more than 1 billion yuan to subsidize travel-related spending during a month-long tourism promotion campaign.

The campaign, centering on the 16th China Tourism Day which falls on May 19, was launched yesterday and will run until May 31, according to a circular released at a press conference held by the ministry.

During the period, government authorities are expected to collaborate with more than 70 partner organizations and roll out over 9,000 measures aimed at benefiting tourists nationwide.

Relevant authorities will also step up efforts to curb misconduct by tour guides, strengthen risk prevention,

and improve services to ensure a safe and pleasant travel experience for tourists, said Li Xiaoyong, an official of the ministry.

The main venue for this year's China Tourism Day themed events will be held in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong Province.

According to local officials, a "ticket stub-based" discount policy will be introduced, enabling visitors to access special offers across the province by presenting valid travel or event stubs, such as airline or high-speed rail tickets, or tickets to major sporting events and performances.

Huo Jianjun, chairman of the China Tourist Attractions Association, said it is estimated that the total value of discounts and concessions offered

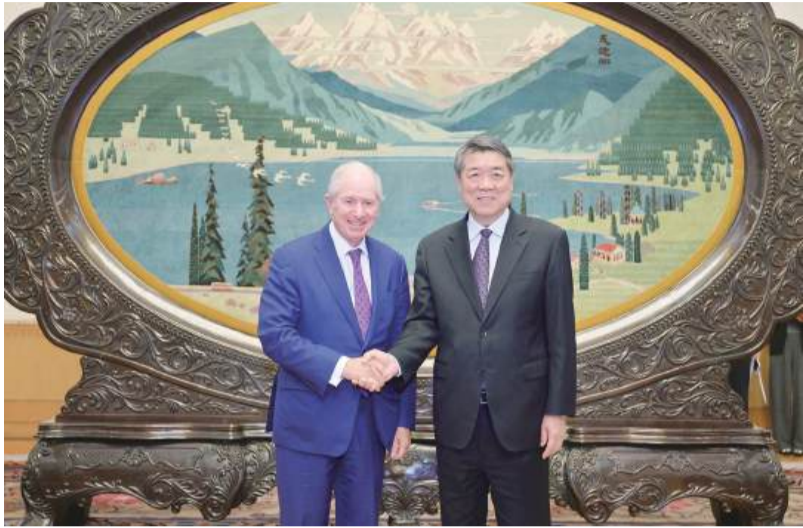
by tourist attractions nationwide will exceed 210 million yuan throughout this year, benefiting more than 60 million tourist visits.

With the five-day Labor Day holiday approaching, China is expected to see a holiday travel boom during the period.

During the three-day Qingming Festival holiday earlier this month, China recorded 135 million domestic tourist trips, up 6.8 percent from a year earlier, while tourism spending rose 6.6 percent to nearly 61.37 billion yuan.

Additionally, in the first quarter of 2026, foreign nationals, a large number of whom benefited from China's expanded visa-free policies, made 21.33 million cross-border entries and exits in the country. — Xinhua

China's vast market to offer the world greater opportunities, more choices: Vice Premier He



Vice Premier He Lifeng (right), also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, shakes hands with Stephen Schwarzman, chairman and CEO of the Blackstone Group, at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. — Xinhua

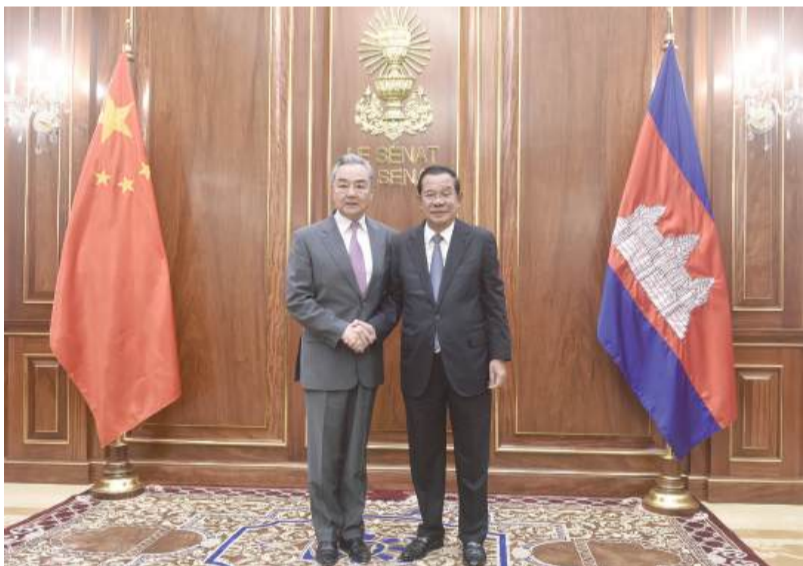
BEIJING—China will unswervingly expand high-level opening up and promote high-quality development, and China's mega-size market will provide the world with greater opportunities and more choices, Vice Premier He Lifeng said yesterday.

He, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, made the remarks during a meeting with Stephen Schwarzman, chairman and CEO of the Blackstone Group, in Beijing.

He noted that China's economy

made a good start in the first quarter of this year, further demonstrating its development resilience and vitality. China welcomes more foreign enterprises, including Blackstone, to continue deepening cooperation with the country and achieve mutual benefit and win-win results, he added.

Schwarzman said Blackstone values its cooperation with China and is willing to further expand its business in the country, and contribute to fostering economic and trade cooperation between the United States and China. — Xinhua



Foreign Minister Wang Yi (left), also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, shakes hands with Cambodian Acting Head of State and Senate President Samdech Techo Hun Sen in Phnom Penh, capital of Cambodia, yesterday. — Xinhua

Think tank forum explores theoretical innovation, major practices of China's governance in new era

BEIJING — Participants in a think tank forum yesterday discussed China's governance practices and theories, noting that these practices and theories offer valuable insights for the world.

The forum, co-hosted by the Institute of Party History and Literature of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and Xinhua News Agency, focused on theoretical innovation and major practices in China's governance under President Xi Jinping's leadership in the new era.

It was attended by about 160 diplomats, think tank experts and media representatives from more than 30 countries.

Qu Qingshan, head of the Institute of Party History and Literature of the CPC Central Committee, said China's governance in the new era has put the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation on an irreversible historical process, opened up new frontiers in adapting Marxism to the Chinese context and the needs of the times, and put forward the concept of building a community with a shared future for humanity, which presents to the world a vision of common development, long-term stability and mutual learning among civilizations.

Fu Hua, president of Xinhua News Agency, said that since the 18th National Congress of the CPC in 2012, China's governance, with its distinct Chinese characteristics, style and ethos, has grown increasingly mature and well established.

Based on a thorough understanding of Xi's governance practices, Xinhua compiled and published the first volume of "China's Governance Under Xi Jinping's Leadership" in both Chinese and English this year, Fu said.

He added that Xinhua stands ready to work with all parties to further explain the philosophy and methodology underpinning China's governance in the new era, and to better share governance

experiences from China and other countries.

Fu noted that the most significant theoretical achievement in governance in the new era is the formation of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, while the most notable practical accomplishment is the continued success of the two miracles of rapid economic growth and enduring social stability.

Lyu Yansong, Xinhua's editor-in-chief, presided over the opening ceremony of the forum, which featured three in-depth discussions on promoting high-quality development to advance Chinese modernization, upholding and developing socialist culture with Chinese characteristics, and building a more fair and equitable global governance system.

As this year marks the beginning of China's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030), many participants focused their discussions on the country's efforts to pursue high-quality development.

"High-quality development is not only an essential requirement of Chinese modernization, but also a shared goal pursued by countries around the world," said Wang Honggang, director of the Institute of Peace and Development, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

"Promoting Chinese modernization through high-quality development is not just about boosting economic growth. It is about creating a sustainable, innovative and inclusive future for all," said Martin Charles, ambassador of Dominica to China, adding that China is embracing a new model of growth that will benefit not just its own people, but the world at large.

Luamanuvae Albert Mariner, ambassador of Samoa to China, said that China in the new era is widely recognized for lifting nearly 100 million people out of absolute poverty and achieving a moderately prosperous society. "It has a wealth of knowledge and

experience to share with the rest of the world, as it continues to open up," he added.

"In China's high-quality development, we see a shift from the sheer pace and scale of growth toward higher quality and more sustainable development," said Hallam Henry, ambassador of Barbados to China.

He noted that China has also shown a strong willingness to share its expertise with countries like Barbados and others across the Global South.

Experts also discussed China's efforts to improve global governance at a time when the world is experiencing changes unseen in a century, highlighting the Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative, Global Civilization Initiative and Global Governance Initiative put forward by China in recent years.

Wang Yuqiang, director of the First Research Department of the Institute of Party History and Literature of the CPC Central Committee, said that the four global initiatives each have their own focus while remaining interconnected. Together, they provide strategic guidance and important support for building a community with a shared future for humanity.

The world we live in is at a crossroads in terms of our shared objectives of pursuing peace and development, said the Ambassador Mariner.

China's role is particularly critical at this time of uncertainty, especially through the Global Governance Initiative, which calls for upholding and strengthening multilateralism with the United Nations at its core, Mariner added.

China can play a constructive role as a stabilizing force advocating for openness, facilitating development partnerships, and contributing to global public goods, with an approach underscoring shared progress and coordination among countries to address common challenges, said Hallam Henry. — Xinhua

China's commitment to openness drives Sino-African ties, mutual prosperity: UN official

ADDIS ABABA — The China-Africa partnership and China's promise for mutually beneficial development are powering Africa's development, as China's continued commitment to openness remains both timely and significant for the continent's resilience amid global economic turbulence, a senior United Nations (UN) official said earlier this week.

Melaku Geboye, coordinator of the African Trade Policy Center at the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), made the remarks during a high-level promotion symposium on

the ninth China International Import Expo (CIIE) and the ninth Hongqiao International Economic Forum (HQF) on Tuesday at the African Union headquarters in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa.

The UNECA official noted Africa's ongoing efforts to build resilience through increased intra-African trade and continental integration to withstand mounting global uncertainties, including dwindling multilateralism and climate-induced disasters.

As Africa works to implement the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), he underscored that the

role of trusted partners remains critical, with the China-Africa partnership demonstrating "impressive resilience" in recent years.

"The system of global economic governance that has been with us for about eight decades is coming under significant strain. Established bilateral relations are being re-examined, and old certainties are being questioned," Geboye said.

He said that, in the face of global challenges, China's continued commitment to openness is both "timely and significant" for Africa, while emphasizing the "enduring and growing importance of the China-

Africa partnership and its promise for mutually beneficial development and ensured prosperity."

The official, in particular, underlined China's decision to grant zero-tariff treatment to products from 53 African countries that maintain diplomatic relations with it as the latest manifestation and "important pillar" of the two sides' cooperation.

According to data released by China's General Administration of Customs, China-Africa trade reached US\$348 billion in 2025, up 17.7 percent year on year and hitting a new record high. Of this total, China's imports from Africa

amounted to 123 billion dollars, an increase of 5.4 percent year on year.

Geboye also underscored the transformative potential of the AfCFTA, noting that by creating a single continental market of over 1.4 billion people, the free trade pact can support industrialization, regional value chains, and export diversification.

Meanwhile, he emphasized the importance of international platforms, such as the CIIE and the HQF, adding that Africa's participation in these platforms will translate into tangible and measurable development outcomes. — Xinhua

S Korea's Samsung workers rally in thousands as strike looms

PYEONGTAEK – Tens of thousands of Samsung Electronics workers rallied in South Korea yesterday to demand higher pay and bonuses, as their threat of a weeks-long strike hung over the technology giant.

Samsung is a major producer of chips used in everything from artificial intelligence to consumer electronics, raising the prospect that the planned walkout could cause severe disruption and losses.

An association of three labour unions held the rally outside the company's plant in Pyeongtaek, south of the capital Seoul, to demand a seven-percent wage hike, the end of a cap on bonuses and other benefits.

"More than 40,000 members" took part, a union official told AFP, declining to be named. Local police did not immediately give an estimate.

Demonstrators waving banners reading "Let's eliminate the bonus cap" and "Change it to be transparent!" gathered in the sunlit streets around the factory, Samsung's largest for making memory and logic chips.

"We will not back down until we are guaranteed a transparent compensation system," said one female union member on stage, drawing applause from the crowd.

The workers are also demanding



Members of the Samsung Electronics labour union stage a mass rally demanding the removal of a cap on performance bonuses, outside the company's foundry and semiconductor factory in Pyeongtaek, South Korea yesterday. – AFP

that Samsung allocates 15 percent of its operating profits for bonuses.

The unions, which represent nearly 90,000 workers in total, have said they will stage a strike from May 21 to June 7 unless a deal with management is reached.

The company said in a statement to AFP that it would "continue to work towards reaching a wage agreement at the earliest possible date".

The dispute comes as South Korean technology firms ride an AI boom that has bumped up national growth, pushed the stock market to record highs and drawn it closer to industry leaders the United States and China.

Samsung's shares have surged nearly 300 percent over the past year, while its rival SK hynix said yesterday that it had obliterated its quarterly profit record.

Samsung said this year it had begun mass production of next-generation high-bandwidth memory chips, HBM4, seen as a key component for scaling up the vast data centres needed for AI development.

Long staunchly anti-union, founder Lee Byung-chul once vowed never to allow unions "until I have dirt over my eyes".

He died in 1987. Samsung Electronics' first labour union was formed in the late 2010s. – AFP

Thailand taps into health, wellness tourism to boost value-driven growth

BANGKOK – The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) is tapping into a rapidly growing health and wellness market as part of its move to shift the country's vital tourism industry toward high-quality, value-driven growth.

The Health and Wellness Trade Meet 2026, held yesterday, brought together 69 Thai health and wellness operators, 74 international buyers, and 24 overseas media and influencers, aiming to reinforce Thailand's position as a premier global destination for health, medical, and holistic wellness tourism.

Hosted by the TAT, the one-day trade meeting was designed to create opportunities and expand networks into international markets, facilitating

over 1,632 business appointments and generating an estimated economic circulation of over 929.62 million baht (about US\$28.65 million).

Speaking at the event, TAT Governor Thapanee Kiatphaibool highlighted that health and wellness have become major driving forces for lifestyle, travel, and investment.

According to the Global Wellness Institute, the global wellness economy was valued at approximately US\$6.8 trillion in 2024 and is projected to expand to nearly US\$7.9 trillion in 2026, reflecting a clear transition into an era of proactive healthcare.

Thapanee said Thailand represents one of the fastest-growing wellness economies worldwide,

with a valuation exceeding US\$42.7 billion in 2024 and a growth rate of over 10 percent compared to the previous year.

Furthermore, the Southeast Asian country's wellness tourism experienced remarkable growth, surging by 36.4 percent year-on-year, nearly three times the global average, and reaching a value of US\$14 billion, she noted.

"This demonstrates strong confidence in Thailand's health and wellness potential, encompassing traditional wisdom, natural resources, modern medicine, and exceptional service, further strengthening its ambition to become a global hub for health and rehabilitation," she added.

– Xinhua

Duterte to face ICC trial after judges confirm charges

THE HAGUE – Former Philippines president Rodrigo Duterte will face trial at the International Criminal Court after judges yesterday confirmed charges of crimes against humanity over his so-called "war on drugs."

Pre-trial judges "unanimously confirmed all the charges... against Rodrigo Roa Duterte and committed him to trial," the ICC said in a statement.

Duterte will be the first Asian former head of state to face trial

at the ICC, which prosecutes individuals for the world's worst crimes such as war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The court faces the most difficult time in its 24-year history, with the United States sanctioning key judges and officials after the ICC issued arrest warrants for Israel's leader over the Gaza war.

It is unclear whether the 81-year-old Duterte will attend his trial.

His defence team says he is too weak mentally to follow

proceedings and he did not appear at a week of hearings to assess the validity of the charges.

The only time he has been seen since his arrest was an initial appearance via video, where he seemed confused and tired, his speech barely audible.

The pre-trial judges concluded there were "substantial grounds to believe that Duterte is responsible for the crimes against humanity of murder and attempted murder," the ICC statement said. – AFP

Myanmar 'considering good things' for detained Suu Kyi: Thai FM

BANGKOK – Myanmar's leader is "considering good things" for detained Aung San Suu Kyi, Thailand's top diplomat said, after meeting the country's coup leader for the first time since he took over as civilian president.

Tropical Myanmar has been led by Min Aung Hlaing since 2021, who as armed forces chief deposed Suu Kyi's elected government, detained the Nobel Peace Prize laureate and sparked civil war.

This month he took over the role of civilian president after an election democracy watchdogs dismissed as a choreographed affair designed to rebrand military rule.

Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow said he raised the issue of Suu Kyi when he met Myanmar's leader in the capital Naypyidaw on Wednesday.

"The president said that she is being well taken care of and the Myanmar government is considering good things, without giving any further details," Sihasak said in a video message before returning to Thailand Wednesday night.

"This should be a good sign," he added.

Min Aung Hlaing last week pardoned Suu Kyi's top aide Win Myint, who served as the ceremonial president of her administration and was also swept into custody in the coup.

Some analysts have dismissed the clemency measure as part of a rebranding effort for Min Aung Hlaing's new administration as it grasps for legitimacy.

The announcement of Win Myint's pardon has nonetheless renewed diplomatic calls for Suu Kyi's release.

The 80-year-old has now been detained for a half-decade – with even her close family saying they have been permitted scant communication with her.

Diplomats and media have persistently queried her status, but Myanmar authorities have insisted her detention on a host of criminal convictions is a matter for the courts.

Win Myint's pardon last Friday, however, came directly from the office of Min Aung Hlaing as part of a mass amnesty to mark Myanmar's new year.

That blanket order also shaved some time off Suu Kyi's 27-year sentence, a source close to her legal case told AFP, although it was not clear how much.

Rights groups say charges against Suu Kyi were concocted in order to sideline her and allow the military to return to power, ending the country's tentative decade-long experiment with democracy.

Min Aung Hlaing was sworn in as Myanmar's civilian president two weeks ago by lawmakers installed in an election which barred Suu Kyi's party and punished protest or criticism with up to a decade in jail.

The election did not take place in huge tracts of Myanmar now controlled by rebels in the civil war, and many armed factions have openly dismissed the vote, saying they will continue fighting. – AFP

Philippine senator criticizes ICC ruling on Duterte case jurisdiction

MANILA – Philippine Senator Imee Marcos has criticized the International Criminal Court (ICC) ruling upholding jurisdiction in the case involving former president Rodrigo Duterte.

In a statement released Wednesday, Marcos said the ruling "disregards the Philippines' sovereign withdrawal from the Rome Statute."

"Justice must be pursued in a manner consistent with our Constitution, our laws, and the integrity of our own judicial processes," she added.

The ICC's Appeals Chamber on Wednesday upheld the court's jurisdiction over the Duterte case, affirming an earlier decision by Pre-Trial Chamber I dated October 23, 2025. The ICC maintained that it has authority over the case. – Xinhua



Kindergarten students react as they are sprayed with water while learning to use hoses with firefighters in Banda Aceh, Indonesia yesterday. – AFP

Rohingya refugee boat exodus surges by 90 pct: Save the Children

DHAKA – The number of Rohingya refugees fleeing Bangladesh and Myanmar by boat has increased by 90 percent compared to last year, Save the Children said yesterday, based on United Nations figures.

Many Rohingya who escape persecution in war-torn Myanmar undertake perilous sea journeys every year in search of better living conditions, travelling on overcrowded, rickety boats often operated by trafficking networks.

Khin Maung, a member of the United Council Rohingya (UCR), an elected refugee council in Bangladesh, said the statistics were deeply “upsetting”.

He said there were awareness programmes about the risks of the journey, but that people were desperate.

“As our children see no future, no clear prospects of repatriation, and face the absence of formal education, they risk their lives,” he told AFP.

More than a million Rohingya refugees, many who fled Myanmar during a brutal military crackdown in 2017, live in vast refugee camps in Bangladesh’s Cox’s Bazar.

“Children and their families face rising insecurity and inadequate aid,” Save the Children official Golam Mostofa said in a statement.

“Many families feel that they

have no choice but to risk their lives and leave by boat - but their journeys are fraught with danger.”

Last year was the deadliest on record for Rohingya refugees fleeing by sea, with deaths continuing to soar in 2026, according to UNHCR, the United Nations refugee agency.

Nearly 900 Rohingya refugees were reported missing or dead in the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal in 2025.

More than 250 Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi migrants were reported missing this month after their boat capsized in the Andaman Sea, a route many travel when heading towards Indonesia.

Data from the UNHCR shows that 2,907 people left by sea from Myanmar and Bangladesh up to March 31 this year, compared to 1,517 people over the same period in 2025.

The cash-strapped UN World Food Programme cut aid for large portions of the 1.2 million-strong Rohingya group in Bangladesh this month.

Save the Children said the ration cuts had affected at least 500,000 Rohingya refugee children.

That was “putting further strain on families, with reduced food security inside the camps driving more refugees to attempt dangerous sea journeys”, the agency said. –AFP

Voting underway in 2 key Indian states

KOLKATA – Voting began yesterday in two of India’s politically key opposition-held states, with tens of millions casting ballots in West Bengal and the southern Tamil Nadu.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the ruling party in the national parliament, is hoping to make inroads in the opposition strongholds.

In West Bengal, which has a population of over 100 million, polling opened in the first phase to elect members from 152 constituencies of the 294-seat legislative assembly.

The second phase, covering the remaining 142 seats, will be held on April 29.

“Nearly 36 million people are eligible to vote,” said Manoj Agarwal, the state’s chief electoral officer, adding that around 8,000 polling stations had been designated “supersensitive”.

Modi’s BJP has waged an aggressive bid to dislodge West Bengal’s Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, the firebrand leader of the All India Trinamool Congress (TMC) which has been in power in the state since 2011.

Banerjee’s party won 213 of the 294 seats in the previous election held in 2021.

Paramilitary forces were deployed, with security heightened along the Bangladesh border.



A voter exits after casting their ballot at a ‘Green polling station’ promoting ecological sustainability during the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly elections in Chennai, India yesterday. –AFP

The campaign was marked by protests over the removal of millions of names from voter rolls during a Special Intensive Revision – meant to remove ineligible voters but which critics say is skewed against marginalised and minority communities.

“We want employment in our state. We want to live with social dignity,” first-time voter Pratik Maity told AFP.

Women’s safety and corruption also featured prominently during the campaign.

In Tamil Nadu, which has a population of over 80 million, polling for the 234-member assembly is

being conducted yesterday in a single phase, with the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) facing off against its long-time rival, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK).

The BJP, a junior ally of AIADMK in Tamil Nadu, has struggled to make significant electoral gains in the southern state.

Results for both elections will be released on May 4.

On the same day, results will also be announced for state elections in Assam and Kerala, as well as the smaller coastal territory of Puducherry. –AFP

Bangladesh measles crisis deepens as child deaths reach 194

DHAKA – Bangladesh has recorded 194 child deaths due to measles in an outbreak that began last month, while the number of suspected child cases has exceeded 28,000, government data showed yesterday.

Between three and five children have died from the disease every day for the past week. Five children died on Wednesday, including three in the capital Dhaka, and another five yesterday.

The government said it has launched a robust nationwide vaccination programme since the outbreak began on March 15, the worst in the South Asian nation for decades.

“Our target is to vaccinate 18 million children,” health department spokesman Zahid Raihan told AFP.

“So far, we have covered a little over one-fourth of our target, and it may take another two weeks to see the impact of this vaccination programme.”

Md Sajib and Afsin Meem lost their three-year-old son, their only child, on Tuesday, and a photograph of a relative carrying his tiny body along a road has been shared extensively on news sites.

“After noticing a rash on our son’s skin, we rushed him to the hospital. Five days later, we

brought him back dead,” Sajib told AFP. “He had a high fever and breathing difficulties.”

Measles is one of the world’s most contagious diseases, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), and is spread through coughs and sneezes.

It can affect people of any age but is most common among children, and can cause complications that include brain swelling and severe respiratory problems.

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, speaking in parliament on Wednesday, blamed the previous government of Sheikh Hasina, who was toppled in a 2024 revolution, and a subsequent caretaker administration for failing to vaccinate the population.

Bangladesh has made significant advancements in vaccinations to tackle infectious diseases, but a measles drive that was due in June 2024 was delayed by the deadly uprising that toppled Hasina.

“The autocratic government that we ousted, together with political parties both inside and outside parliament, did not procure vaccines,” said Rahman, who took power in February.

Rahman said Bangladesh was receiving assistance from the UN children’s agency, but there was a shortage of testing kits. –AFP



This combination of photographs shows different signboards on top of Shikaras, a traditional wooden boat at the iconic Dal Lake in Srinagar, India yesterday. –AFP

Hackers steal US\$2.5 million from Sri Lanka finance ministry

COLOMBO – Cyber criminals hacked into the Sri Lankan finance ministry’s computer system and siphoned off US\$2.5 million, the government said yesterday, the most amount of cash ever stolen by hackers from a state institution in the debt-saddled country.

The cyber attack is a major blow to Sri Lanka, which is recovering from a crippling economic crisis in 2022 after Colombo defaulted on its US\$46 billion external debt.

The money was destined as debt repayment to Australia, finance ministry secretary Harshana Suriyapperuma told reporters in the capital.

Four senior officers at the Public Debt Management Office (PDMO)

were suspended after the breach, he said.

Authorities were alerted to an attempt to break into the ministry’s e-mail server, and investigations showed that a US\$2.5 million payment owed to Australia had disappeared.

“Criminal investigators are looking into this and we are not in a position to give further details,” Suriyapperuma said, adding that Sri Lankan authorities were seeking help from foreign law enforcement agencies.

Sri Lanka established the PDMO earlier this year in line with an IMF-backed US\$2.9 billion bailout loan from early 2023, following the

island’s economic meltdown.

Australia’s High Commissioner in Sri Lanka, Matthew Duckworth, said Canberra was aware of “irregularities” in payments owed to it.

“Sri Lankan authorities are investigating the matter and are coordinating with Australian officials, who are assisting the investigation,” Duckworth said on X.

“Australia remains committed to supporting Sri Lanka’s return to debt sustainability.”

The attack came as Sri Lanka’s central bank and finance ministry launched an advertising blitz in local newspapers earlier this year, warning Sri Lankans not to fall prey to cyber scams. –AFP

Trump orders Iran mine-layers sunk, as Iran tolls tankers

TEHRAN – President Donald Trump ordered the US Navy yesterday to destroy any Iranian boat caught laying mines in the Strait of Hormuz, putting more pressure on a fraying ceasefire as disruption from the Gulf stand-off battered the world economy.

Trump's announcement came after the US fleet boarded a vessel in the Indian Ocean that was transporting oil from Iran and after a senior Iranian official said Tehran had banked its first proceeds from the tolls it exacts on shipping through the strait.

With plans for renewed peace talks in Pakistan hanging in the balance, more fuel-hungry airlines cancelled flights, oil prices climbed higher once again and the keenly-watched S&P Global PMI index showed eurozone business activity shrinking for the first time in 16 months.

"I have ordered the United States Navy to shoot and kill any boat, small boats though they may be... that is putting mines in the waters of the Strait of Hormuz," Trump posted.

Iran vowed it would keep the strait closed to all but a trickle of approved vessels for as long as the US Navy blockades its ports, brushing off demands from Trump to both reopen Hormuz and surrender its enriched uranium.

The US responded to Iran's action by imposing its own blockade of Iranian ports, and yesterday the Pentagon announced on social media that US forces had "carried out a maritime interdiction and right-of-visit

boarding of the sanctioned stateless vessel M/T Majestic X transporting oil from Iran, in the Indian Ocean".

The post included footage of US military personnel rappelling from helicopters onto the deck of a large tanker.

The statement said the US would "continue global maritime enforcement to disrupt illicit networks and interdict vessels providing material support to Iran, wherever they operate".

'Not possible'

While strikes around the region have mostly ceased since the two-week-old truce began, there has been no letup in the confrontation over Hormuz, with both sides seeking economic leverage – only for Trump to announce an indefinite ceasefire to create space for more talks.

"A complete ceasefire only has meaning if it is not violated through a naval blockade," said Iran's parliamentary speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, who led Tehran's delegation at a first round of talks in Pakistan.

"Reopening the Strait of Hormuz is not possible amid a blatant violation of the ceasefire."

Ghalibaf's deputy, Hamidreza Hajibabaei, said Iran received its first revenue from tolls it is imposing on ships seeking to cross Hormuz, a route that in peacetime accounts for a fifth of the world's oil and gas flows, and other vital commodities.

Analysts said Tehran, in particular its hardline leaders associated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), believes that Iran's blockade gives it sufficient economic leverage to force Washington to back down on its main demands in peace talks.

And some, such as Danny Citrinowicz of the Tel-Aviv Institute for National Security Studies, criticised Israel and the US for misreading the Iranian government's position.

"Tehran has consistently demonstrated a willingness to absorb economic pain while holding firm on what it views as core national interests. There is little reason to believe this time will be different," he said in a social media post.

"Rather than moving toward concession, Iran is positioning itself to escalate."

A brief from the Soufan Center think tank said Iran's hardliners "argue that a prolonged elevation of global energy prices and mounting global shortages of some goods will increasingly pressure Trump to accede to Iran's positions, end the war, and eventually withdraw US forces from the region.

"Trump and his team calculate the opposite – that the US blockade of Iran's seaborne trade, which carries all of its oil exports, will quickly cripple Iran's economy and force Iran to accept US demands."

Peace talks

On Wednesday, Trump told the New York

Post that talks could resume in Pakistan within two to three days, even though Iran has not confirmed participation and Vice President JD Vance put his travel to Islamabad on hold on Tuesday.

In the Pakistani capital, blanket security remained in place for the fourth straight day in anticipation of possible talks, with transport disrupted and the city's government quarter and adjacent commercial centre all but shut down.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards on Wednesday said they forced two ships to the Iranian shore from the Strait of Hormuz.

The US military's Central Command said, prior to yesterday's announcement, that its forces blockading Iran's ports had so far "directed 31 vessels to turn around or return to port".

After agreeing the ceasefire with Iran, the United States helped broker a truce between Israel and Lebanon, including Hezbollah.

Despite the declared truce, Israeli strikes killed five more people on Wednesday, Lebanese media said.

Israel and Lebanon will hold a second round of talks in Washington on Thursday, during which Beirut will request a one-month extension of the ceasefire during the meeting, according to a Lebanese official.

Israeli attacks on Lebanon have killed more than 2,450 people since the start of the war, according to Lebanese authorities. – AFP



Supporters of the son of Iran's last shah, exiled Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi, demonstrate near the Reichstag building, seat of the German lower house of parliament, in Berlin, yesterday. The placards call for a "free, secular and democratic Iran with Reza Pahlavi". Pahlavi said during a press conference in the German capital yesterday that any negotiations with the authorities in Tehran amounted to a "policy of appeasement," expressing hope that new protests would eventually overthrow the theocracy. – AFP

Iran's Mojtaba Khamenei 'gravely wounded' but 'mentally sharp': NYT

WASHINGTON, DC – Iran's new supreme leader Mojtaba Khamenei was seriously wounded in the US-Israeli airstrike that killed his father and predecessor Ali Khamenei but is mentally sharp, *The New York Times* reported yesterday.

Citing several Iranian officials which it did not name, the *NYT* said Mojtaba Khamenei had "at least for now" delegated decision-making to generals in the Revolutionary Guards ideological army.

Mojtaba Khamenei has not appeared in public since succeeding his father and only issued written statements, creating speculation over his condition and if he is still alive.

Although Mojtaba Khamenei was "gravely wounded [in the February 28 airstrike], he is mentally sharp and engaged," said the *NYT*.

"One leg was operated on three times, and he is awaiting a prosthetic. He had surgery on

one hand and is slowly regaining function. His face and lips have been burned severely, making it difficult for him to speak," it cited the officials as saying, adding that "eventually, he will need plastic surgery."

Access for security reasons is extremely limited to Khamenei, who remains in hiding, with only handwritten messages passed on, it said.

Revolutionary Guards commanders do not visit him but President Masoud Pezeshkian, who is also a heart surgeon, has been involved in his care, it said.

It said the generals from the Guards who viewed the war with the US and Israel "as a threat to the regime's survival" that has now been contained.

They have also been in charge of military strategy, including the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz. – AFP

Israel supreme court hears petitions on Oct 7 state inquiry

JERUSALEM – Israel's top court yesterday examined petitions seeking to force the government to establish a state commission of inquiry into the failures that led to Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack.

The government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has long refused to establish such a commission, the likes of which Israel has commonly set up in the past to investigate major state-level failings.

According to polls, a large number of Israelis across the political spectrum support the establishment of such a body to determine who is responsible for the authorities' failure to prevent the deadliest-ever attack on Israel.

The decision to create a state commission rests with the government, but its members must be appointed by the president of the supreme court.

Netanyahu's ruling coalition, one of the most right-wing in the country's history, has accused the court of political bias.

"This honourable court has no authority to compel the government," the government's lawyer Michael Rabello said in front of the supreme court judges.

"There is no precedent... not anywhere in the world, not even in India or in any other democratic state, of a court ordering the government to establish a commission of inquiry," he added.

Separate inquiry

Netanyahu is resisting the establishment of a state commission of inquiry until the multi-front war triggered by Hamas's October 7 attack ends.

His government has tried to counteract public calls with a bill introduced by Netanyahu's Likud party to create a "special state commission of inquiry".

The members of this alternative commission would in theory be chosen half by coalition and half by opposition

lawmakers, but if the opposition refuses to cooperate, power to appoint members would ultimately be given to the parliamentary speaker – effectively handing control to the governing coalition.

Opposition leaders have said they would boycott a commission appointed by politicians.

The government and lawmakers from Netanyahu's right-wing Likud party have regularly asserted that this commission would be independent.

Several NGOs including the Movement for Quality Government in Israel, as well as a group of citizens, petitioned the supreme court to challenge the bill that would create this special commission.

In an opinion submitted to the court in January, Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara, who also serves as the government's legal adviser, backed the petitioners, arguing that the government was "gravely undermining the possibility of reaching the truth".

Netanyahu plans to lead his party's list in the general election that must be held no later than the end of October, as Israel faces a climate of deep polarisation.

Before the hearing opened yesterday, clashes broke out at the entrance to the courthouse in Jerusalem between relatives of October 7 victims, some of whom support the government, according to footage broadcast on television.

During the hearing, Likud lawmaker Tali Gotliv was expelled from the courtroom after repeatedly interrupting proceedings.

Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel resulted in the deaths of more than 1,221 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official data.

Israel's retaliatory campaign in Gaza has killed over 72,500 Palestinians, according to figures from the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory. – AFP

In Algerian desert, Sahrawi refugees still dream of independent homeland

TINDOUF, Algeria – In a wind-lashed desert encampment in Algeria, Sahrawi refugees are separated from their homeland by a short distance and a border, but many say their half-a-century-long struggle for independence has not wavered.

The vast mineral-rich former Spanish colony of Western Sahara is largely controlled by Morocco but has been claimed for decades by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Río de Oro, better known by its acronym Polisario Front – a pro-independence group backed by Rabat's regional foe, Algiers.

In Tindouf, where the United Nations estimates that over 170,000 Sahrawi refugees live in five main camps, many still hold fast to the dream of self-determination, despite wide international endorsement of a Moroccan sovereignty plan.

At the Aousserd camp, 81-year-old Habiba Bent Ali Elouadjem said she dreams of going back to her “homeland”.

“Every people has the right to live on its land,” she told AFP.

Morocco maintains that Western Sahara is an integral part of the kingdom and proposes a plan in which it would be an autonomous Moroccan territory.

But the Polisario Front has long demanded a referendum on self-determination instead, which Rabat opposes.

Last October, with the backing of the Trump Administration, the United Nations Security Council voted in favour of Morocco's plan, describing it as the “most feasible outcome”.

The US had already recognised Morocco's sovereignty over the territory in 2020, within days of Rabat's normalisation of ties with Israel in a deal backed by President Donald Trump in his first term.

US and Spanish media have reported that officials from Morocco, the Polisario Front, Algeria and Mauritania already took part in two rounds of covert talks in Spain last February, adding that the negotiations were centred on Morocco's autonomy proposal.

‘We’ll never give up’

Further talks on the conflict were slated to be held behind closed doors at the UN Security Council yesterday.

But far from New York, Morocco's autonomy plan finds little to no traction among Sahrawi refugees, many of whom were displaced in waves since Moroccan forces entered Western Sahara in 1976.

In Aousserd, children run among modest encampment dwellings, battered by the sun and Saharan sands. Some chanted:

“No to the autonomy plan” – a common refrain among Sahrawis.

Many recently gathered to mark the 50th anniversary of the proclamation of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic by the Polisario Front.

“We will never back down,” said Hadjeb Bent Sid Ahmed Ouled Hamma, 76. “We will never give up on the independence of our country.”

Abdelhadi El-Goueiri, a 29-year-old mining engineer, said he pursued his studies “to follow in the path of our fathers in the struggle for full independence and to free ourselves of colonialism”.

Life in the camps is heavily dependent on humanitarian aid, with the refugees often facing shortages of food and water.

Many here express gratitude to Algeria for its support – from food supplies to schoolbooks and medicine – but say their aspirations lie across the border.

“If we could talk about international law, then it must be recognised that there is a people here and decades of struggle for a just cause,” said Fatema Bent Khattery Sidi Abedi, a 56-year-old teacher.

She lamented the hardships endured in the camps, including long sandstorms during which “everything disappears under the dust” for days.

‘Inalienable right’

Under neighbouring canvas tents, women spin wool while others grind seeds using traditional stone mills.

In another tent, children recite verses from the Quran, reading in unison from the chipped wooden tablets on which they transcribed them.

Further on, a wedding is in full swing, with music and dancing.

But even after decades of exile, the refugees cling to “an inalienable right to self-determination”, said Ouali Ahmed Sidi Moulai, a 55-year-old trader, who described the conflict as “a matter of decolonisation”.

Many countries including France, the United Kingdom and Spain have recognised Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara.

But the territory remains on the UN list of non-self-governing territories, while the Polisario Front still demands a UN referendum on self-determination, which was promised under a 1991 ceasefire but never held.

The Sahrawis meanwhile remain defiant.

“We will not accept at any rate [Morocco's] autonomy plan... whatever sacrifices are required and despite pressure from the international community,” said Salima Bent Elghifri Ahmed, 75.

– AFP

US eases access to cannabis for medical use



Marijuana is displayed by a protester during the annual NYC Cannabis Parade & Rally in support of the legalisation of marijuana for recreational and medical use, on May 1, 2021 in New York City. – AFP

WASHINGTON, DC – The US government yesterday made it easier for Americans to use cannabis for medical reasons by reclassifying the drug and enabling more research into its safety and efficacy.

Marijuana is now described as having moderate to low addiction potential, “expanding patients’ access to treatments and empowering doctors to make better-informed healthcare decisions,” acting attorney general Todd Blanche said.

The government appears to be catching up with broad societal shifts in the United States – adult marijuana use for any reason is legal in 24 states and the US capital, and approved for medicinal use in 40 states.

Until yesterday, it was still ranked federally as “Schedule I,” a category for drugs, including heroin and methamphetamine, with no accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse.

Marijuana products approved or regulated by federal or state agencies have now been moved to the third rung of a five-level Drug Schedule.

Schedule III substances, which

include ketamine and anabolic steroids, are considered to have medical value and less potential for abuse.

The Department of Justice (DOJ) said yesterday's move followed up on President Donald Trump's executive order in December on increasing medical marijuana research.

It also called for expedited hearings beginning in June that would “provide a timely and legally compliant pathway to evaluate broader changes to marijuana's status under federal law,” a DOJ statement said.

‘Begging’ for change

The long-awaited move does not legalise marijuana use in states where it is still banned or sanction its use as a recreational drug.

But Trump in December said it would make it better available for “legitimate medical uses” such as for people with cancer and chronic pain.

“We have people begging for me to do this. People that are in great pain,” Trump said in the Oval Office.

Trump, who was surrounded by white-coated medical experts for

the announcement, added that the order “is not the legalisation” of marijuana.

The 79-year-old teetotaler added: “I’ve always told my children, don’t take drugs, no drinking, no smoking, and just stay away from drugs.”

US presidents cannot unilaterally reclassify a drug. Trump's order directed the Department of Justice to expedite the process.

Democrat Joe Biden's administration pursued reclassification, but efforts were not completed before Trump took office in early 2025.

The US has a patchwork of state-level regulations regarding the commercial distribution, recreational possession and personal cultivation of cannabis.

The government's move is aimed at lowering barriers to research, as authorising clinical studies on Schedule I substances can require many layers of approval.

“These actions will enable more targeted, rigorous research into marijuana's safety and efficacy,” Blanche said.

It could also be a major tax boost for companies that legally grow and sell cannabis.

– AFP

Irish security watchdog warns over Islamist ‘terrorism’ threat

DUBLIN – A new Irish security watchdog said yesterday that the threat of attacks by Islamist extremist groups and “lone wolves” was a cause of concern.

In its first annual report, the Independent Examiner of Security Legislation warned Ireland faced “far broader” threats now than those posed in the past by the militant IRA group.

“Today, Islamist terrorism is a significant cause of concern,” said the report.

“Either because of the possibility of attacks within this jurisdiction – and there have been a number of

such attacks within the past number of years – and also the possibility of an attack on a neighbouring jurisdiction being planned or launched from this State,” it said.

The watchdog was set up last year to review the EU member's security legislation, with former senior judge George Birmingham appointed as head examiner in October.

Right-wing and left-wing extremism was also a real concern, as well as “unease about the activities of hostile state actors,” said the report.

“The possibility of actions

undertaken by so called ‘lone wolves’, whether motivated by terrorist ideology or not, also requires consideration,” it said.

Legislation designed to give Irish authorities the powers to minimise such threats was weak and outdated, the report said.

Gaps in current legislation cited in the report included no provision for intercepting messages over WhatsApp, Telegram or Snapchat.

There is also no legislative basis to access content of “data-based material”, such as webpages or internet browsing history, it added.

– AFP

Pope Leo ends Africa visit with open-air Mass in Equatorial Guinea



Thousands attend Mass by Pope Leo XIV (seen on the giant screen) at the Malabo Stadium in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea's former capital, on the last day of an 11-day apostolic journey to Africa, yesterday. – AFP

Malabo
MALABO – Pope Leo XIV yesterday held an open-air Mass in Equatorial Guinea in front of tens of thousands of followers, wrapping up his first major international tour that began with harsh criticism of his stance on Iran from US President Donald Trump.

The leader of the world's 1.4 billion Catholics arrived in Equatorial Guinea on Tuesday.

On his final day in the oil-rich former Spanish colony of two million inhabitants he officiated at a Mass before 30,000 people at a stadium in Malabo, the former capital.

He was due to arrive back in Rome last night (local time).

Earlier this month, Trump called the US-born pontiff "very weak on crime and other things" and said he was "wrong" to call

for an end to violence in the Iran war, in comments that cast a pall over the early stages of his four-country, 11-day Africa tour.

The pope later expressed regret that his speeches were being interpreted as a response to the US leader's criticism and maintained he had no interest in debating with him.

Yet throughout the trip, from Algeria to Cameroon, then on to Angola and Equatorial Guinea, he piled high his calls for social justice, peace and respect for human dignity, while denouncing inequality, corruption and the unfair exploitation of natural resources by "tyrants".

His newly forceful style, blasting those who "in the name of profit, continue to lay their hands on the African continent to exploit and plunder it", was a marked

departure from the restraint he had shown since he was elected in May last year.

Equatorial Guinea has been ruled by President Teodoro Obiang Nguema since 1979.

Leo urged the central African country to place itself "in the service of law and justice".

On Wednesday, the pope went to Equatorial Guinea's Bata prison, where he was greeted by hundreds of shaven-headed inmates in the driving rain.

Pope Leo – born Robert Francis Prevost – is at 70 relatively young for a pope and has shown energy that contrasts sharply with the declining health of his Argentinian predecessor, Francis, who died a year ago at 88.

His next trip abroad will be to Spain from June 6 to 12.

– AFP, MPD

Portugal picks Air France-KLM, Lufthansa to make offers for TAP

LISBON – Portugal yesterday asked Air France-KLM and Lufthansa to make binding offers to buy a controlling stake in TAP Air Portugal, as the government seeks to privatise an airline it rescued during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Portuguese government announced last September that it was seeking a major international airline to buy most of the 49.9 percent stake that it plans to privatise.

Air France-KLM and Lufthansa both submitted non-binding offers this month, and Portugal's government now wants them to submit binding bids within three months.

"Two of the three big European airline groups... are in the running, which demonstrates the attractiveness of the company as well as the country," said Finance Minister Joaquim Miranda Sarmento.

IAG, the parent company of British Airways and Iberia, had

earlier expressed an interest in taking a stake but did not make a bid.

Infrastructure Minister Miguel Pinto Luz, who is in charge of the privatisation of TAP, said a final decision could be made in August or early September.

TAP, which was renationalised in 2020 to stem losses from the COVID-19 pandemic, is among the few remaining state-owned carriers in Europe.

International airlines are circling around TAP primarily because of its routes to Brazil and Portuguese-speaking Africa.

"Thanks to its ideal geographical position, Lisbon would become the group's unique southern European hub," Air France-KLM said earlier this month, adding that it would offer "extensive connectivity" to the Americas and Africa.

The airline has around 7,700 employees and a fleet of around 100 Airbus planes.

– AFP



An Embraer 190 of Portuguese airline TAP takes off on November 24, 2016 from Toulouse-Blagnac airport.

– AFP

Spain's ex-PM Rajoy denies ordering political spying at trial

MADRID – Former Spanish prime minister Mariano Rajoy denied in court yesterday ordering or knowing about an alleged spying campaign against his conservative party's ex-treasurer who threatened to expose its corruption.

The high-profile trial affecting the right-wing opposition People's Party (PP) centres on ex-interior minister Jorge Fernández Díaz, who served under Rajoy between 2011 and 2016 at the time of the alleged skulduggery.

Fernández Díaz and ex-interior ministry officials are accused of a plot to spy on and silence ex-PP treasurer Luis Barcenas, using public money and without any legal basis.

Barcenas, who served as treasurer until 2009, entered pre-trial detention in 2013 for irregularities in PP accounts and had threatened to reveal secrets about illegal party financing because he did not feel sufficiently supported.

The clandestine police operation allegedly aimed to allow Barcenas's driver to seize compromising documents held by the ex-treasurer and his wife.

Testifying as a witness yesterday, Rajoy denied ordering a spying campaign against Barcenas's family or involvement in the movement of hidden party funds during a 30-minute declaration at Spain's top criminal court, the Audiencia Nacional.

"I did not know this police operation was happening, I found out

afterwards," in 2021, said Rajoy, who governed from 2011 to 2018.

He also dismissed any connection between himself and transcripts of conversations by top police and political officials that referred to "the bearded one" or "the Asturian".

"My name is Mariano Rajoy, as everyone knows. And then each person calls me what they want," said the former premier, who always sported a beard and spent part of his childhood in the northern region of Asturias.

In an interview published in *El Mundo* daily, Barcenas had said it was "impossible that an operation of this kind was carried out without the knowledge of the party's highest authorities", without mentioning Rajoy by name.

The trial began earlier this month and is due to last three months. Prosecutors are seeking 15 years in jail for Fernández Díaz for charges including embezzlement and breaching privacy.

Barcenas was eventually sentenced to 12 years in prison for illegal financing of the PP.

The affair combined with other corruption cases that tainted and ultimately toppled Rajoy's government in 2018 and brought current Socialist premier Pedro Sánchez to power.

Other graft scandals linked to the Socialists have further damaged public confidence in Spain's political class.

– AFP

Brazil revokes US official's credentials in latest diplomatic spat

BRASÍLIA – Brazil revoked the credentials of a US police attaché on Wednesday after a Brazilian official was forced to leave the United States – the latest twist in troubled bilateral ties.

The Trump administration on Monday asked Marcelo Ivo, a liaison officer in Miami for Brazil's Federal Police, to leave the country.

According to US and Brazilian media reports, Ivo was involved in the US arrest of Brazil's fugitive ex-spy chief Alexandre Ramagem, a close ally of far-right former president Jair Bolsonaro.

Ramagem fled Brazil late last year after being sentenced to 16 years in prison on charges of helping Bolsonaro attempt a coup to keep the leftist Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva from taking power following the 2022 election.

Ramagem was detained by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) on April 13 but released two days later.

The US State Department said on Monday it had asked an unnamed Brazilian official to leave the country for attempting to "game" the American immigration system, in an attempt to extend an unspecified "political witch hunt" to American soil.

US President Donald Trump used the same term last year to describe the Brazilian Supreme Court trial of Bolsonaro, his close ally.

The right-wing ex-president, Ramagem and other former officials were found guilty of attempting to carry out a coup following Bolsonaro's 2022 election loss.

Brazil's federal police chief Andrei Rodrigues told Globo News television on Wednesday that Ramagem's arrest had stemmed from bilateral cooperation on immigration.

"Regretfully today [Wednesday] I withdrew the credentials of the US official working with the federal police...until we can clear up definitively what happened," he said.

Ivo's expulsion "fails to observe the good diplomatic practice of dialogue between friendly nations," Brazil's foreign ministry said in a statement confirming the tit-for-tat response to the United States.

Rodrigues said Ivo had done nothing wrong and it was "insane" to think he tried to fool the United States.

Rodrigues asserted that Ramagem had been arrested in Florida over a traffic infraction.

Supporters of Ramagem said it was Trump who had him released from detention.

Trump slapped tariffs on Brazil in retribution for the trial of Bolsonaro, who is now serving a 27-year prison term over the coup plot.

The levies were eventually partially eased as ties between Trump and the leftist Lula warmed.

Lula is seeking re-election in October and is running against Flávio Bolsonaro, a son of the ex-president.

– AFP

Football shorts

Bayern Munich win 8th women's Bundesliga title

BERLIN – Bayern Munich became women's Bundesliga champions for the eighth time, and fourth in a row, after a 3-2 win at Union Berlin on Wednesday.

The victory took Bayern an unassailable 15 points clear of second-placed Wolfsburg, who could only manage a 0-0 draw Werder Bremen.

With the scores level at 2-2 late on, Bayern looked set to drop points for only the second time in the league this season, but substitute Giulia Gwinn struck in the 84th minute to snatch victory and the title for the visitors.

Edna Imade and Barbara Dunst also got on the scoresheet for Bayern, while Union's Sophie Weidauer and Lia Kamber scored for the hosts in front of a crowd of 13,220 in the German capital.

Next up for Bayern is their Champions League semi-final first leg against Spanish giants Barcelona in Munich tomorrow.

The game will be played at 12:15 a.m. Sunday morning Macau time.

"This is absolutely incredible," Dunst told reporters, before adding: "We have another big match coming up in the next few days, so we're taking it easy for now. We'll save it for later."

Gwinn said the side would celebrate with some "good music - and maybe a shandy or two."

The victory, which came three days after the men's team won the Bundesliga with four games remaining, demonstrated Bayern's dominance of the German game.

Both Bayern's men's and

women's sides remain on track for a treble, a feat which has never been achieved in European football.

Bayern's men go to holders Paris Saint-Germain in the first leg of their Champions League semi-final next week.

Bayern's women face rivals Wolfsburg in the German Cup final. The men beat Bayer Leverkusen in the semi-finals 2-0 on Wednesday.

– AFP/MPD

Barcelona women clinch 7th straight league title

BARCELONA – Barcelona claimed a seventh consecutive women's Spanish league title on Wednesday after beating Espanyol 4-1 in the Catalan derby.

Teenage Norwegian forward Martine Fenger scored twice, with Caroline Graham Hansen and Carla Julia also on target, as Barcelona wrapped up the title with four games to spare.

It is Barcelona's 11th league crown overall and caps another dominant season in which they have won 25 of their 26 top-flight matches, their only slip-up coming in a defeat by Real Sociedad in November.

Real Madrid have a game in hand but trail by 16 points in second place.

Barcelona are chasing a treble and will face Bayern Munich in the semi-finals of the Women's Champions League. They are also through to the final of the Copa de la Reina, where they will meet Atletico Madrid on May 16.

The Champions League game will be played at 12:15 a.m. Sunday morning Macau time.

– AFP/MPD

Spain's Yamal injured, but expected to be fit for World Cup



BARCELONA – Spain's Lamine Yamal has picked up a hamstring injury, but is expected to be fit for the upcoming World Cup, his club Barcelona announced yesterday.

"Tests have confirmed that first-team player Lamine Yamal has a hamstring injury in his left leg," Barca said.

"The player will undergo conservative treatment. Lamine Yamal will miss the rest of the season and is expected to be available for the World Cup," which runs from June 11-July 19 this year.

Spain open their campaign in Group H against Cape Verde on June 15 before taking on Saudi Arabia on June 21 and finishing their pool play against Uruguay six days later.

Yamal picked up the injury in Barcelona's 1-0 victory over Celta Vigo in La Liga action on Wednesday.

"This injury is going to keep me off the pitch just when I wanted to be there the most, and that hurts even more than I can put into words," Yamal wrote on social media.

"This isn't the end, it's just a break. I'll come back stronger, with even more determination than ever, and next season will be better."

The teenage Spain star, who has scored six goals in 25 appearances for the national side since making his debut in 2023, won and converted a penalty to clinch a narrow home triumph over Celta.

But after beating Ionut Radu with a low penalty, Yamal pulled up hurt immediately, calling for treatment and lying on the turf as his



Barcelona's Spanish forward Lamine Yamal (centre) reacts to being fouled by Celta Vigo's Spanish midfielder Yoel Lago (right) during the Spanish league match between FC Barcelona and RC Celta de Vigo at Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona on Wednesday. – AFP

team-mates came over to celebrate.

The right winger was replaced by Rooney Bardghji.

"He wouldn't leave the pitch without reason," said Barcelona coach Hansi Flick. "As a coach you have to manage it, you have to live with it. It's a pity that Lamine is injured now."

Barcelona's win moved them nine points clear of Real Madrid at the top of the table with six matches remaining, including a Clasico on May 10.

Yamal is the club's leading scorer with 24 goals this season despite missing games in September and October with a groin issue.

He was an integral part of Spain's winning side at Euro 2024, and earlier this week spoke of his excitement about the World Cup.

"Ever since I was a little boy, I've dreamed of playing in a World Cup, of seeing my mum in the stands, of representing the national team," Yamal said at the Laureus World Sports Awards.

"These two months will seem very short to me and I hope we'll finish as champions."

There is little doubt that he will feature in manager Luis de la Fuente's final squad, even if he is not yet fully fit.

Yamal joins a list of several key Spain internationals sidelined or edging their way back to full fitness, including Rodri, Fabian Ruiz, Mikel Merino and Nico Williams.

However, the 18-year-old could be rested at the start of the tournament given the significant risk of aggravating the injury. – AFP

Manchester City go top of Premier League as Burnley relegated



BURNLEY – Manchester City edged ahead of Arsenal at the top of the Premier League as a 1-0 victory at Turf Moor condemned Burnley to relegation on Wednesday.

The defeat confirmed the Claret's third Premier League relegation in five seasons, consigning them to the Championship alongside Wolves next season.

Erling Haaland scored the only goal as Pep Guardiola's men ended the day top of the table for the first time since August, but the City boss was frustrated at his side's inability to win by a greater margin.

City go ahead of the Gunners only on goals scored, with five games left for both the title contenders.

"The chances were there. We created a lot. We made a fantastic game," said Guardiola. "We did everything after a demanding game three days ago."

However, City have on paper the tougher run-in as they aim to snatch a seventh league title in nine years.

Fresh from beating Arsenal 2-1 in what was billed as a title decider on Sunday, the visitors roared out of the blocks.

A stunning save by Martin Dubravka turned Rayan Cherki's shot onto the woodwork.

Haaland was then set free by Jeremy Doku and coolly chipped over the advancing Dubravka with just five minutes on the clock.

City continued to pepper Dubravka with

efforts from distance, but Guardiola grew visibly angry as they let the tempo drop in their pursuit of more goals.

Burnley could even have been level by half-time as Zian Flemming dragged a glorious chance wide.

Haaland hit the post after the break, but City's failure to rack up a more convincing scoreline leaves the title race tantalisingly poised.

'Fallen a bit short'

At the other end of the table, Burnley have to rebuild once more in the second tier.

A return of just 20 points from 34 games has left Scott Parker's men 13 adrift of safety with only four games remaining.

"We've fallen a bit short. The facts are we had to overachieve this year and we've not managed to do that," said Parker.

"In certain moments we've lacked a certain quality about us and not managed to get enough points."

It is the fifth consecutive season that Burnley have either been relegated or promoted as they oscillate between the riches of the Premier League and the Championship.

Three wins from their opening nine games offered hope that they could join Sunderland and Leeds in bucking the trend of promoted sides being immediately relegated back to the second tier.

However, just one win in their 25 matches since has sealed their fate.

Parker has become a Championship specialist, also winning promotion in the past with Fulham and Bournemouth.

But the former Tottenham and Chelsea midfielder has consistently struggled at all three clubs to make an impact in the Premier League.

Bournemouth's challenge to qualify for Europe for the first time was dented by Sean Longstaff's 97th-minute equaliser for Leeds in a 2-2 draw.

Junior Kroupi's opener for Bournemouth was quickly cancelled out by a James Hill own goal.

Rayan's strike had the Cherries on course for the top six until Longstaff's volleyed leveller.

A point edges Bournemouth above Chelsea, who sacked Liam Rosenior on Wednesday, into seventh.

Leeds are now nine points clear of the relegation zone. – AFP



Manchester City's Belgian midfielder Jeremy Doku (centre) battles for the ball with Burnley's English defender Bashir Humphreys (right) during the English Premier League match between Burnley and Manchester City at Turf Moor in Burnley, north-west England on Wednesday. – AFP

Chinese couple wins first 2 golds of Sanya Asian Beach Games

SANYA – China made a golden start at the sixth Asian Beach Games yesterday as husband-and-wife duo Fan Junjie and Lin Xinyu won the men's and women's aquathlon titles respectively, claiming the first two gold medals of the Games.

Aquathlon, making its debut at the Asian Beach Games, features a 2.5-km run, followed by a 1-km swim and another 2.5-km run. Fan clocked 28 minutes and 20 seconds to win the men's race, finishing 10 seconds ahead of teammate Teng Yunfeng, while Pan Tzu-I of Chinese Taipei took bronze.

"I'm extremely excited to win the first gold medal for the Chinese delegation and deliver a strong start," said Fan. "Competing at home, I gave everything to keep the gold in China."

Lin continued China's dominance by winning the women's race in 31 minutes and 34 seconds. Cambodia's Margot Morokot Garabedian finished second, 26 seconds behind, while China's Lu Meiyi secured bronze.

In jiu-jitsu, three gold medals were awarded on the opening day, with the United Arab Emirates taking two titles. Khaled Al Shehhi won the men's -62kg category, and

Asma Al Hosani topped the podium in the women's -52kg event.

The Philippines claimed the remaining gold as Alexandria Luz Enriquez defeated Lee Yeon-ji of South Korea in the women's -63kg final.

In beach kabaddi, Iran's men's team beat defending champion Pakistan 38-28, while title favorite India advanced to the women's semifinals with a victory over Sri Lanka.

A total of eight gold medals will be decided today across women's water polo, beach athletics, dragon boat and jiu-jitsu.

– Xinhua
Photos on page 16



Rank	NOC	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
1	China	2	1	1	4
1	United Arab Emirates	2	1	1	4
3	Philippines	1	0	1	2
4	Republic of Korea	0	2	0	2
5	Cambodia	0	1	0	1
6	Kazakhstan	0	0	1	1
6	Mongolia	0	0	1	1
6	Saudi Arabia	0	0	1	1
6	Chinese Taipei	0	0	1	1
6	Thailand	0	0	1	1

Sabalenka fights rust to reach 3rd round of Madrid Open

Tennis

MADRID – Aryna Sabalenka shook off some rust to post her first victory of the season on clay and extend her winning streak to 13 matches yesterday in Madrid.

The world number one, who was playing her first match since she completed the Sunshine Double by winning Indian Wells and Miami last month, committed 26 unforced errors in her 7-5, 6-3 win over American Peyton Stearns in the second round in the Spanish capital.

The defending champion, in search of a fourth career title at the Caja Magica, converted four of 12 break points against Stearns, double-faulted five times, and dropped serve twice, before she made it over the finish line to set up a third-round meeting with Romanian Jaqueline Cristian.

"I'm super happy to start with a win, even though maybe the tennis wasn't that good, but I felt like with every game I was playing, the better I was playing, so I really hope in the next one I bring a better performance," said Sabalenka, who has won a

remarkable 24 of her 25 matches so far in 2026.

Earlier on Manolo Santana Stadium, Iga Swiatek made quick work of her opening test in Madrid, breezing past Daria Snigur 6-1, 6-2.

The Polish fourth seed needed just 61 minutes to move past Snigur, who was coming off the first tour-level main draw victory of her career on clay over Daria Kasatkina.

The Ukrainian qualifier saved four match points against Kasatkina on Wednesday, and secured the win by clinching the longest first-to-seven tiebreak at tour-level in eight years with a 15-13 scoreline.

Snigur had little fight left in her for her clash with Swiatek, who barring a brief blip early in the second set was in fierce form as she continues her quest for a first clay-court title since she claimed a fourth Roland Garros crown nearly two years ago.

"I'm very happy. Madrid is a special place to play, because of how special the tournament is, but also because of the conditions, so I'm happy that I adjusted well

to them and was solid and just playing my game," said Swiatek, who is contesting her second tournament under the guidance of her new coach Francis Roig.

Swiatek, a champion in Madrid in 2024, swatted away three break points to open up a 5-0 lead inside 23 minutes and closed out the set eight minutes later after Snigur finally got on the board.

Snigur enjoyed a much stronger start to the second set, finding the rhythm on her backhand to put pressure on Swiatek, who got broken for the first time in the contest to fall behind 0-2.

The Ukrainian's advantage was short-lived though as Swiatek struck right back and swept the next six games to book a third-round meeting with Ann Li or Alycia Parks.

Meanwhile, Hungarian world number 63 Anna Bondar upset seventh-seeded Elina Svitolina 6-3, 6-4 to claim the first top-10 victory of her career.

Swiss 11th seed Belinda Bencic eased past Petra Marcinko 6-4, 6-2 and will next take on Russian 18th seed Diana Shnaider in round three.

– AFP



Bangladesh's Najmul Hossain Shanto (right) poses with the 'player of the match' trophy at the end of the third one-day international (ODI) cricket match against New Zealand at the Bir Sreshtho Flight Lieutenant Matiur Rahman Stadium in Chittagong, Bangladesh yesterday. Shanto scored a century and Mustafizur Rahman claimed 5-43 as Bangladesh beat New Zealand by 55 runs in the third one-day international to clinch the series 2-1 yesterday. Shanto hit 105 off 119 balls, smacking nine fours and two sixes for his fourth ODI century to lift New Zealand from early trouble to 265-8 after being invited to bat first in Chattogram.

– AFP

Jones calls on Australian fans to get behind Japan at World Cup

Rugby

SYDNEY – Eddie Jones said yesterday he hoped Australian fans would roar on his Japan side when they face Ireland north of Sydney in July, and then again a year later at the Rugby World Cup.

Japan as hosts famously upset Ireland in the 2019 World Cup and the two sides will lock horns again in a Nations Championship Test in the New South Wales city of Newcastle on July 11.

It will be the first neutral Test played in Australia since before the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It's a great experience for us to play here, get used to the

environment, maybe become the team in Newcastle," Japan head coach Jones told reporters at the city's stadium.

"You know, when we play up here in the World Cup, we want all the Newcastle people to support Japan," said the Australian.

Jones said the Test against the world's third-ranked side would be invaluable for his players ahead of Japan's opening World Cup match against Samoa at the same venue on October 3, 2027.

"We'll be up here for a week for the Samoa game. So it's how you can maximise your preparation for that week," said Jones.

"It's really important because

we'll have, you know, a relatively young team for the World Cup.

"And you talk to players about their experience of a World Cup, particularly young players, and they can't remember anything, right, because it becomes a blur?"

"So having had the experience of playing in this ground, just that little bit of familiarity will definitely be a potential advantage."

Jones said that Ireland's rise to the top echelons of the world rankings was an inspiration for smaller rugby nations.

"Ireland's a great example of what you can do with a small population," said the former Australia and England coach, now

in his second spell in charge of Japan.

"Five million people have become a top-four team in the world by really maximising the talent they've got.

"And, you know, that's a challenge for Japan, as it is for Australia at the moment, to do the same sort of thing.

"So they're a good team, tough team, smart team, so we're looking forward to playing against them."

Irish Rugby Football Union president John O'Driscoll said he expected the game would draw a "huge" number of expat fans to the 30,000 capacity stadium.

The inaugural men's Nations

Championship will this year pit the northern hemisphere's Six Nations sides against New Zealand, South Africa, Australia, Argentina, Japan and Fiji in a series of Tests.

The winner will be crowned at a finals weekend played at Twickenham in November.

"It's given a series of games that are always important some more meaning and it has a championship finals at the end," said Jones.

"So I think it's a good innovation by World Rugby."

The Rugby World Cup in Australia kicks off on October 1, 2027, when the hosts face Hong Kong in Perth.

– AFP

‘Dancing in their hands’: Japanese wig masters set stage alive

Natsuko Fukue

TOKYO – Every actor in kabuki – a traditional Japanese performing art celebrated for its striking makeup and elaborate costumes – relies on one final, essential element to fully inhabit their role: the wig.

Ahead of a show at the famed Kabuki-za theatre in central Tokyo, wig master Tadashi Kamoji carefully places a topknot creation on a young performer in a flamboyant kimono costume.

“A kabuki actor can’t just walk onto the stage as he is... it’s only when he puts on a wig that he truly becomes a kabuki performer,” 60-year-old Kamoji told AFP.

“So we must take pride in our job with a sense of very heavy responsibility.”

Often hidden behind the curtain, the profession has found itself in the international spotlight after “Kokuho” – a box-office hit about two “onnagata”, male players of female kabuki roles – was nominated for Best Makeup and Hairstyling at the Oscars this year.

Dating back to the 17th century, Kabuki is a fusion of dance, drama and music, and sees actors don ornate costumes, wigs and heavy makeup for performances in old dialect on elaborate sets.

After a craftsman creates the wigs using human hair, Kamoji’s job is to style them.

But his role goes beyond that of hairdresser.

“You cannot do a good job if you don’t grasp the character’s nature,” said Kamoji, a fourth-generation “tokoyama” who joined the profession at 18.



This picture taken last Monday shows kabuki wig master Tadashi Kamoji (left) helping kabuki actor Tanenosuke Nakamura to put on his wig before his performance at the Kabuki-za Theatre in Tokyo. Every actor in kabuki – a traditional Japanese performing art celebrated for its striking makeup and elaborate costumes – relies on one final, essential element to fully inhabit their role: the wig. – AFP

Whether it’s a middle-aged man with a strong sense of justice, or a high-ranking courtesan, a wig serves to convey age, social status, occupation and personality.

At his atelier, Kamoji spent two hours fashioning the wig for the young actor, sculpting beautifully curved sides and a topknot called a “mage” – a classic hairstyle modern Japanese no longer wear – for his sumo wrestler role.

Kneeling on a tatami floor, he sectioned the hair using a traditional comb and smoothed it with steaming irons, occasionally pulling a string with his teeth to secure strands.

These specialists are “truly indispensable,” the wig’s 33-year-old recipient Nakamura Tanenosuke, told AFP.

“There is almost no kabuki performance without wigs,” said the

actor, who has been working with the masters since the age of five and is sporting Kamoji’s artistry this month for his show about a noble family feud.

‘The final touch’

Backstage at the Kabuki-za theatre, Tanenosuke covers his face in thick white foundation and his assistants help him pull on a large, navy-and-white striped kimono.

“The wig is the final touch that completes the transformation. I see each step as a switch leading to that exact moment when you fully become



This photo taken last month shows wig master Tadashi Kamoji creating a wig for kabuki actors at his atelier in Tokyo. – AFP

the character,” Tanenosuke said.

“As well as the artistry of the actors, the beauty of the costumes and stage sets is also key to the audience’s enjoyment, and I believe the wigs play a part too.”

In total, there are around 400 types of wigs for female roles, and 1,000 for male parts.

A fresh creation is crafted for each performance and customised for each actor, taking between a few hours and a month to complete depending on the complexity.

Despite doing the job for four decades, Kamoji says he’s only just come to believe he’s capable.

“To this day, there are still things

I learn from my father” who is 85, he said.

“It’s endless. When I watch the seniors, it looks as though the hair is dancing in their hands.

“I don’t think I’m there yet, but I suppose I will be able to control hair when I’m about my father’s age.”

But the efforts feel worthwhile when actors receive a huge cheer or a round of applause on stage.

“I feel as though part of it belongs to us,” Kamoji said.

“If the audience thinks the actor looks brilliant, it makes me feel that our [wig] perhaps suited him. I very much feel a sense of joy in that.”

– AFP



This picture taken last month shows kabuki actor Tanenosuke Nakamura applying makeup before his performance at the Kabuki-za Theatre in Tokyo. – AFP

Reggae icon Meta to headline Stereo Africa Festival in Dakar

DAKAR, Senegal – Rising reggae star Meta Dia will headline this year’s Stereo Africa Festival in Dakar celebrating contemporary African music and the sounds of the diaspora.

Meta – who sings in English, French, Wolof and Pulaar – is renowned for his socially conscious music, unifying messages and captivating performances.

He will take the stage on May 9 for a special concert at the festival, which is now in its fifth year.

“Performing in Senegal is my greatest dream,” the Senegalese-born singer-songwriter has told AFP recently.

Having settled in the United States nearly 25 years ago, his

band, Meta and the Cornerstones, is set to release a new album, “Echoes of Time”, on May 29.

The international reggae group blends Afro, soul and hip-hop influences atop a roots reggae foundation, and is acclaimed for its overall contributions to modern reggae.

“Senegal shaped me spiritually and that spirituality is the backbone of my music, it is the message I carry with me wherever I go”, he said.

“I have travelled the world but I miss the place I call home, so having this opportunity to return and perform in Senegal is a true joy”, he said.

The founder of the Stereo

Africa Festival, Sahad Sarr, a singer-songwriter and frontman of the Senegalese band SAHAD, will also perform among some 30 concerts that run from May 5 to 10.

He called Meta and the Cornerstones “the ambassador of African reggae, currently the most talented in the world”.

Since its inception, the Stereo Africa Festival has attracted more than 10,000 attendees and hosted 250 local and international artists.

It also features a “Stereo Revelations” programme, a springboard for young Senegalese talent which has awarded past recipients a year of professional guidance and support to help establish their careers. – AFP



A resident in Dakar sits on Wednesday in the shade next to posters advertising “Stereo Africa,” a major festival of contemporary African and diaspora music marking its fifth anniversary, ahead of next month’s event at the Blaise Senghor Cultural Center in the Senegalese capital Dakar. – AFP

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 13°C~26°C	Manila 24°C~36°C	New York 9°C~18°C	Lisbon 13°C~23°C
Shanghai 11°C~23°C	Bangkok 26°C~35°C	London 5°C~19°C	Rio de Janeiro 19°C~27°C
Hong Kong 20°C~22°C	Tokyo 9°C~20°C	Frankfurt 5°C~21°C	Luanda 24°C~29°C
Taipei 18°C~21°C	Singapore 24°C~32°C	Vancouver 7°C~16°C	Maputo 18°C~24°C
Guangzhou 17°C~21°C	Kuala Lumpur 25°C~35°C	Paris 8°C~23°C	Dili 25°C~30°C
Nanjing 10°C~23°C	Jakarta 24°C~33°C	Moscow -1°C~7°C	São Tomé 25°C~33°C
Guilin 13°C~27°C	Seoul 10°C~26°C	Las Vegas 14°C~28°C	Praia 19°C~27°C
Xi’an 11°C~26°C	Sydney 14°C~23°C	Monte Carlo 13°C~21°C	Bissau 20°C~37°C



Wu Jiaxin (second left) spikes the ball during the beach volleyball men's preliminary pool A match between Wang Yanwei/Wu Jiaxi of China and Tam Chit Meng/Tai Kuan Seng of Macao at the 6th Asian Beach Games in Sanya, Hainan Province, yesterday. - Xinhua

Orapa Senatham (top) of Thailand competes with Andrea Lois Lao of the Philippines during their Jiu Jitsu women's -63kg contest for bronze medal at the 6th Asian Beach Games in Sanya, Hainan Province, yesterday. - Xinhua



Movahed Mohammadpour Baltork (front, right) of Iran vies with Albloushi Kamal of the United Arab Emirates during the beach soccer men's first round group B match between Iran and the United Arab Emirates at the 6th Asian Beach Games in Sanya, Hainan Province, yesterday. - Xinhua

Sailors compete during the ILCA 4 boys opening series race of the sailing event at the 6th Asian Beach Games in Sanya, Hainan Province, yesterday - Xinhua



Athletes compete during the Foil Windsurfing Girls at the 6th Asian Beach Games in Sanya, Hainan Province, yesterday. - Xinhua

Simran Kamboj (left) of India competes during the Beach Kabaddi Women's Team Group A match against Sri Lanka at the 6th Asian Beach Games in Sanya, Hainan Province, yesterday. - Xinhua