

Liaison deputy chief urges local officials to enhance ability in 7 aspects



Zhang Yingjie, a deputy director of the Central People's Government Liaison Office in Macau, addresses yesterday's briefing session at the University Hall on the University of Macau (UM) campus.



Secretary for Administration and Justice Wong Sio Chak addresses yesterday's session at the University of Macau. – Photos: SAFF

Tony Wong

Macau's Public Administration and Civil Service Bureau (SAFF) yesterday held a briefing session about the spirit of this year's "two sessions" for local officials and other senior public servants, during which Secretary for Administration and Justice Wong Sio Chak urged officials and public servants to put the spirit of this year's two sessions into practice when fulfilling their duties to enhance Macau's governance level and advance public administration reform.

During yesterday's session, Zhang Yingjie, a deputy director of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Macau Special Administrative Region

(MSAR), said that Macau officials and public servants must enhance their capabilities in seven aspects such as the ability to adapt to technological advancement, and the ability to strike the right balance between the interests of different parties in Macau's civil society.

The nation's two sessions refer to the annual sessions of the National People's Congress (NPC) and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) in Beijing in March.

This year's annual session of the NPC, held in the nation's capital last month, passed the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan.

The plan, officially known as 15th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social

Development, covers the period between 2026 and 2030.

The Macau government is scheduled to complete the drawing-up of Macau's 3rd Five-Year Plan and start implementing the plan this year. It has underlined its commitment to closely aligning Macau's third five-year socioeconomic development plan, also covering the period between 2026 and 2030, with the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan.

Yesterday's briefing session, which lasted two hours, was held at the University Hall on the University of Macau (UM) campus. About 450 local officials and other senior public servants attended the session, which was also addressed, in addition to Wong and

Zhang, by Lao Ngai Leong, a Macau deputy to the NPC, and Alan Ho Ion Sang, a Macau member of the Standing Committee of the CPPCC National Committee.

Delivering an opening speech at the start of the session, SAFF Director Leong Weng In noted that the briefing session aimed to enable local officials and public servants to gain a better understanding of the nation's latest development strategies outlined by its 15th Five-Year Plan and Macau's development direction in close alignment with the country's overall development, thereby enhancing their capabilities to serve Macau and make greater contributions to the national development.

Continued on p.5

Tourism plummets in US-blockaded Cuba

HAVANA – Tourist trips to Cuba almost halved since the beginning of the year, Havana's statistics office said, as a US fuel blockade pummels the island and international flights remain suspended.

Cuba has weathered severe economic difficulties since the imposition of a US trade embargo in 1962, but US President Donald Trump's fuel blockade of the island nation since January marks a new economic low, with regular blackouts now part of daily life.

The harsh measures have not spared Cuba's tourism sector, usually its second-

biggest source of foreign currency and an employer of over 300,000 people.

Between January and March, the island received 298,057 foreign visitors – 48 percent fewer than the same period in 2025, figures published by the national statistics office ONEI showed.

March saw a record-breaking drop, when just 35,561 foreign tourists visited Cuba.

The decline affected markets across the board, with 54.2 percent fewer visits from Canada and 37.5 percent fewer Russian tourists.

Tourists from the Cuban community living abroad, mostly based in the United States, meanwhile fell by 42.8 percent.

Tourism in Cuba previously flourished somewhat thanks to a diplomatic rapprochement between Havana's communist government and former US president Barack Obama.

But the COVID-19 pandemic hampered growth, with Cuba's tourism revenues declining by 70 percent between 2019 and 2025.

Tougher US sanctions under Trump followed, and even before the ongoing fuel

blockade was imposed, tourism had fallen by 17.8 percent.

Fuel shortages have pushed several international airlines to temporarily halt flights to the island.

The island's medical services, nickel and tobacco exports have also suffered severely under the US fuel blockade.

Havana has been bracing for a possible attack following repeated warnings from Trump that Cuba is "next" on his list after the ouster of Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro and US-Israeli attacks on Iran. – AFP

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The Macau Post Daily

Chinese EV carries forward China-Britain cultural connection in Shakespeare's hometown

A BYD Dolphin rolled slowly through Stratford-upon-Avon, the hometown of William Shakespeare, passing the Peony Pavilion, a Chinese-style garden structure in the town center with red pillars and upturned eaves glowing in the afternoon sun. – Story on p. 6

Iran FM blames US for failure of talks as he meets with Putin

Iran's top diplomat blamed Washington yesterday for the failure of Middle East peace talks during a visit to Russia, where President Vladimir Putin promised him Moscow's support in bringing the war to a close. – Story on p. 10

Nations backing fossil fuel exit 'a new power': conference host Colombia

Around 60 nations are attending a world-first conference in Colombia to tackle an issue that has deadlocked the UN climate talks – how to exit the fossil fuels that cause global warming. – Story on p. 12

Gongbei Customs seizes 20 cultural relics at Qingmao checkpoint

Armando Neves

Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs announced in a statement yesterday that its officers at the Qingmao checkpoint seized 20 cultural relics recently.

According to the statement, the customs officers discovered an anomaly in the image when they conducted an X-ray inspection of a male traveller's backpack in the "green channel" of the pedestrian checkpoint's exit hall.

Upon inspection, they discovered a total of 20 suspected cultural relics, namely silver coins, in the backpack, the statement said, adding that on April 17, the Cultural Relics Appraisal Station of Guangdong Province identified the artefacts as silver coins from between the 18th and 20th centuries, which are classified as general cultural relics prohibited from being taken out of the Chinese mainland.

Gongbei Customs reminded the public that according to the Cultural Relics Protection Law of



This undated handout photo provided by Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs yesterday shows 20 silver coins from between the 18th and 20th centuries, seized by its officers recently.

the People's Republic of China (PRC), any cultural relics intended for export must undergo inspection by an authorised cultural relics exit-entry examination agency designated by the State Council's cultural relics administration.

Upon approval, the State Administration of Cultural Heritage will issue an exit permit for verified

cultural relics, and the relics can only be exported through designated border checkpoints.

Any entity or individual shipping, mailing, or carrying cultural relics out of the mainland must declare them to customs, and customs officers will release the items only upon presentation of the verified cultural relics' export permits. ■

PATA Travel Mart to return to Macau in 2027

Rui Pastorin

The Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) Travel Mart, one of Asia Pacific's longest-standing international travel trade exhibitions, will mark its return to Macau after a decade, with the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) hosting the event in 2027 following the editions last held in the city in 2017 and 2010.

The announcement by PATA and MGTO was made in an MGTO statement yesterday.

Set to be held from September 20 to 22 next year, the event, as described on the PATA website, will feature activities for delegates including the main trade show, a full-day insight forum on the latest industry trends, and the PATA Gold Awards 2027. There will also be networking and contracting opportunities.

The fair is set to gather tourism officials and industry professionals

"from travel destinations across the Asia-Pacific region and the world", the MGTO statement pointed out.

MGTO Director Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes said, as summarised in the statement, that she was "looking forward to welcoming PATA Travel Mart delegates once again next year for a firsthand update on the dynamic developments of Macau as a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure, with an emphasis on diversification".

The statement also highlighted that the event has always been "an important platform for Macau's tourism industry to connect with peers in the Asia Pacific and beyond".

Moreover, the statement highlighted that aside from the two previously held PATA Travel Mart (PTM) editions in 2010 and 2017, the PATA Annual Conference in 2005, PATA Annual Meeting in 2009, and the PATA Annual Summit in 2024, were also held in Macau. ■



This file photo taken in 2017 and provided by the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) yesterday shows the PATA Travel Mart in Macau in 2017.

Identification bureau launches ID card return kiosks

24 政府24小時自助服務中心
Centro de Serviços de Auto-Atendimento de 24 horas do Governo

Macao SAR Resident Identity Card Return Kiosk

The Identification Services Bureau (DSI) launched the Resident Identity Card Return Kiosk to provide greater convenience for citizens to return Macao Resident Identity Cards belonging to deceased relatives or friends, or found identity cards.

- Select the reason for return
- Enter contact number (if applicable)
- Insert the ID card as instructed

This infographic provided by the Identification Services Bureau (DSI) yesterday shows its resident identity card (BIR) return kiosk machine.

Khalel Vallo

The Identification Services Bureau (DSI) announced in a statement yesterday that it launched self-service resident ID card (BIR) return kiosks that day, allowing the public to conveniently return identity cards of deceased relatives or lost cards that had been found.

The new kiosks are currently installed at three government 24-hour self-service centres located in Praia Grande, Venceslau de Morais and central Taipa, providing round-the-clock access for document return services, the statement noted.

According to the statement, the machines are designed for ease of use, where users simply follow on-screen instructions, select the reason for returning the card – either due to the holder's passing or because it was found – and provide contact information before depositing the card into the kiosk.

The fully automated process aims to save time and reduce the need for counter services, the statement said, noting that in cases where a cardholder passes away outside Macau, relatives who are aware of the death but have not yet declared it must submit the original death certificate to one of the bureau's service centres to complete the formalities.

Further details on kiosk locations and services are available on the official webpage of the bureau at <https://www.dsi.gov.mo/eservice>. Residents may also call 2837 0777 or 2837 0888 for enquiries during office hours.

The statement noted that the introduction of the kiosks is expected by the bureau to streamline the return process for resident ID cards, offering a more efficient and accessible public service for the community. ■

AlipayHK enables 'Companion Code' for Macau buses

Armando Neves

The Transport Bureau (DSAT) announced in a statement yesterday that, in order to streamline fare payments and improve bus operational efficiency, AlipayHK has introduced a "Companion Code" feature following successful coordination and testing. The new system allows passengers to pay for up to two additional companions simultaneously.

Using the "Companion Code", the fare is set at 6 patacas per person, per journey. The statement clarified that no fare discounts or transfer concessions apply to these transactions.

The bureau noted that it has been in ongoing communication with the Monetary Authority of Macao (AMCM), the city's two public bus operators (TCM and

Transmac), and various payment service providers to expand the range of electronic payment methods available on public transport, further facilitating the use of local bus services.

In a statement issued on February 10, the bureau announced that public buses already supported WeChat Pay (both for the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong versions) and Alipay (Chinese mainland version only) for multi-passenger payments, allowing users to pay for three fares at once using a single code.

The bureau said that it will continue to closely monitor the effectiveness of these new payment options and work to introduce further methods to improve travel convenience for both residents and tourists. ■



This photo downloaded from Mobus Fandom shows a Macau Pass Machine on a public bus in Macau.

Published since Aug 2004

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- Printed by Tipografia Welfare Lda., 82-86 Rua dos Pescadores
- Chatbots: DeepSeek, Gemini, Poe
- Wire services – AFP, Xinhua

Macau Weather

MAINLY CLOUDY. OCCASIONAL SHOWERS. A FEW THUNDERSTORMS. FORCE 3 TO 4 SOUTH TO SOUTHEASTERLY WINDS WITH GUSTS. RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 80% AND 98%.



22°C~26°C

Source: SMG

UM Symphony Orchestra to host debut concert next Tuesday

Interview by William Chan

The University of Macau Symphony Orchestra (UMSO) will hold its debut concert, “A Night at the Symphony”, on campus next Tuesday.

The programme features pieces by Ravel, Tchaikovsky, Grieg, Gershwin, as well as Bricusse, and Newley.

Formed just last year, UMSO is the university’s first symphony orchestra. Although the university does not offer a music major, it has for years trained amateur students under professional music teachers, allowing them to learn music and perform as an ensemble. Besides the new orchestra, the university currently has a Chinese orchestra, a choir, and a symphonic band. Residential colleges also regularly hold music events for students.

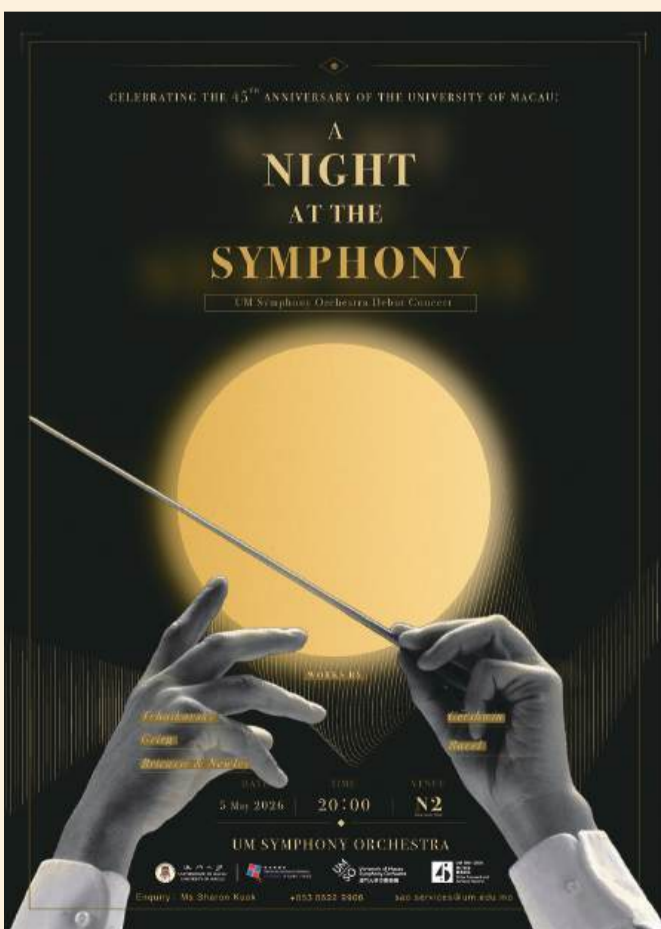
Ng Sa, former conductor of the university’s symphonic band*, now leads the orchestra. When asked about his thoughts on the establishment of this new ensemble, he underlined: “The prospect of this ensemble is unlimited. We are drenched in excitement for the upcoming concert, and we are overwhelmed with gratitude in our hearts. In order to achieve what we have established so far, the timing had to be right, and a lot of work and selfless dedication had to be in place to make this happen”.

As a non-profit orchestra, Ng said UMSO values creating artistic memories above all. “What matters most is a good atmosphere. There’s a saying: ‘The music doesn’t lie.’ Everyone has their share of dull moments in life, but when the downbeat** is initiated, we can all just put aside our daily struggles for a moment and let the vibrations take their course. When we prepare for a concert, it is a process of learning and growth. Through the process of decoding each musical note, we also gain more knowledge in dealing with life itself. I often have this feeling: when the music speaks, everything is going to be fine in the end. The music doesn’t lie.”

The concert also serves to celebrate the 45th anniversary of the University of Macau. Admission to the concert is free. The concert will take place on May 5 at 8 p.m. at the University Hall (N2) on the UM campus. For tickets, email sao.services@um.edu.mo.

*A symphonic band (or concert band) is an ensemble of woodwinds, brass, and percussion, without string instruments (except sometimes double bass or harp). A symphony orchestra includes all those families plus violins, violas, cellos, and double basses as its core.

** In music theory and performance, the downbeat refers to the first beat of a measure (bar). It is the strongest beat in a musical sequence and serves as the primary anchor for the rhythm. – Gemini



Poster of the University of Macau Symphony Orchestra's (UMSO) debut concert “A Night at the Symphony”

‘Face-to-Face Meeting’ aims to promote sci-tech cooperation between Macau & Hangzhou: DSEDJ chief



The musical robot ensemble from Hangzhou performs during yesterday's opening ceremony. – Photos: Armindo Neves

Armindo Neves

The Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) hosted a one-day event at the Macau Science Centre (MSC) in Nape yesterday, titled “Face-to-Face Meeting Between Hangzhou Innovation and Technology Enterprises and Macau Youth 2026”.

The event was also attended by Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Wallis O Lam and Lyu Yuyin, a deputy director of the Liaison Office of the Central People’s Government in the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR).

In a speech, DSEDJ Director Kong Chi Meng said that his bureau is committed to supporting the national strategy of building a technologically strong nation and promoting in-depth cooperation between Macau and the Chinese mainland. This, Kong noted, is being achieved by integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into primary and secondary school curricula, advancing international education projects, and optimising the disciplinary structure of Macau’s higher education institutions to strengthen talent cultivation.

Kong expressed his bureau’s gratitude to several leading technology companies from Hangzhou* for visiting Macau to exchange ideas and collaborate, noting that they have acquired the status as “Macau Youth Science Ambassadors”. These companies specialise in cutting-edge fields such as AI, humanoid robotics, elderly care service robots, and 3D digital fashion, Kong said, encouraging Macau’s youth to leverage this opportunity by visiting prominent innovation hubs, including Hangzhou, thereby creating further opportunities for Macau’s future.

The opening ceremony included a performance by the famous “Hexuan Band” from Hangzhou, a humanoid robotic musical ensemble; its name “Hexuan” literally translates to “Chord” in English. It consists of three robotic musicians.

According to a DSEDJ statement, the six Hangzhou-based science and technology companies invited to the event were DEEP Robotics, Hangzhou Lingban Technology Co.,



Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) Director Kong Chi Meng delivers a speech during the opening ceremony of the event at the Macau Science Centre in Nape.

Ltd., Zhejiang Qiangnao Technology Co., Ltd., Zhejiang Lingdi Digital Technology Co., Ltd., Hangzhou Taixi Intelligent Technology Co., Ltd., and Hangzhou Xialing Interactive AI Service Robot Co., Ltd.

The statement also said that representatives from the six companies will visit the University of Macau (UM), Macau Polytechnic University (MPU), Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST), City University of Macau (CityU), as well as Keang Peng School, Chan Sui Ki Perpetual Help College, and Escola Luso-Chinesa Técnico-Profissional today and tomorrow. Through presentations and exhibitions of their work, they will showcase scientific and technological achievements to faculty and students, engaging in in-depth exchanges, the statement said.

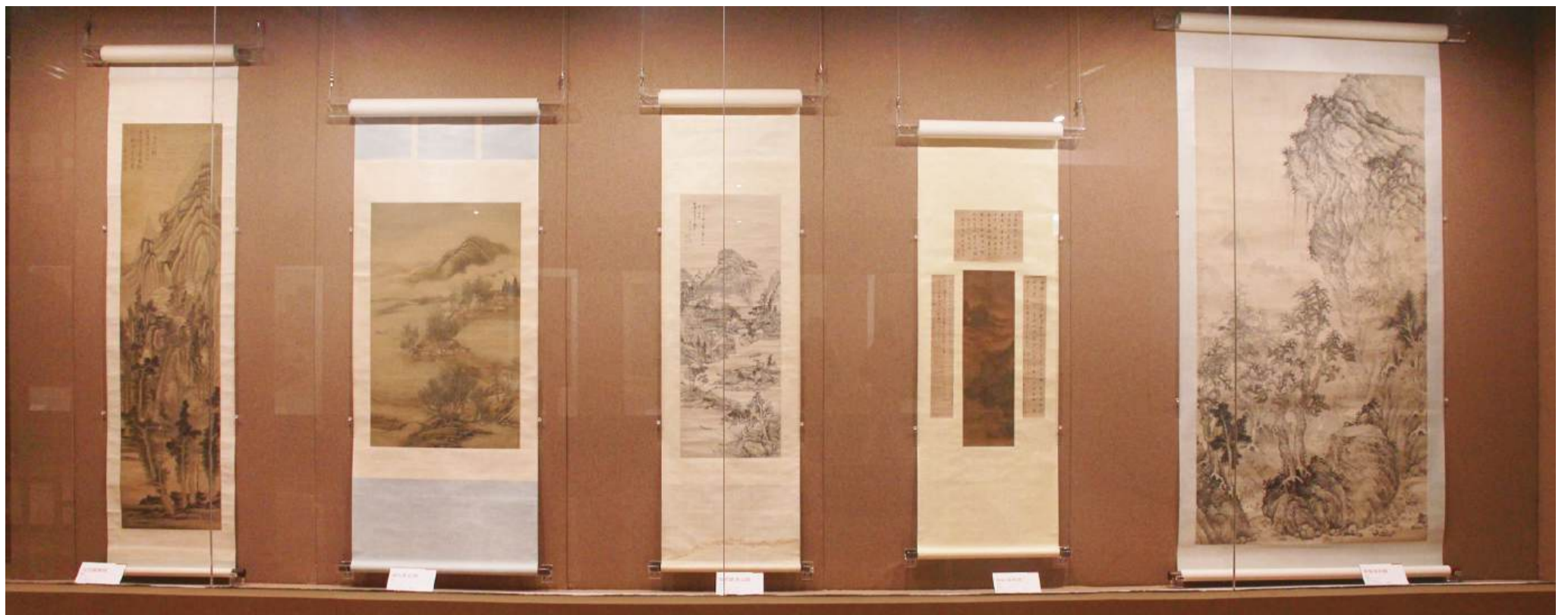
During the event, the Macau Science Centre signed agreements with the six companies, aiming to deepen technological exchanges and cooperation in science popularisation between Hangzhou and Macau, and to jointly promote science education in both regions.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the event, Kong said that his bureau plans to leverage the “Youth Science and Technology Village” at the Macau Science Centre to arrange

for local students to study and train at enterprises in Hangzhou, establishing a regular exchange mechanism. The bureau will collaborate with Macau’s higher education institutions and tech companies to strengthen the technological literacy of young people, promote research interactions, and facilitate talent exchanges between the two places, Kong added.

According to Kong, by using Hangzhou as a starting point and integrating the advantages of the Greater Bay Area (GBA), the aim is to promote the long-term development of Macau’s technology industry. ■

* Hangzhou is the capital of Zhejiang province and one of the nation’s most prominent political, economic, and cultural centres. Located at the southern end of the Grand Canal, it is often described as a city where ancient heritage meets the digital frontier. The city of about 12.6 million inhabitants is internationally recognised as China’s “Silicon Valley”. It is the global headquarters of Alibaba Group and home to other tech leaders like NetEase and Ant Group. Hangzhou’s Westlake University is a prestigious, research-orientated university that has become a centre for cutting-edge science and robotics. – Gemini



MAM shows Ming & Qing landscape paintings from NMC

Khalel Vallo

An exhibition titled “Duet of Nature: Ming and Qing Landscape Paintings from the National Museum of China” opened on Friday at the Macau Museum of Art (MAM) in Nape, showcasing classical Chinese landscape art and its philosophical depth.

Co-organised by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) and the National Museum of China (NMC) in Beijing, with MAM as the executive organiser, the exhibition features 65 pieces/sets of landscape paintings dating from the 15th to 19th centuries.

Works by renowned artists such as Shen Zhou, Dong Qichang and Gong Xian are displayed. The exhibition is divided into two sections, “Exploring Magnificent Landscapes”

and “Expressing Sentiments through Nature”, presenting the evolution of landscape painting during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1912) dynasties, highlighting how artists combined realism and freehand expression, translating their experiences of nature into visual and emotional narratives.

Addressing the opening ceremony, IC President Deland Leong Wai Man said that “we are gathered here today [Friday] at the Macau Museum of Art to witness the grand opening of the exhibition ‘Duet of Nature: Ming and Qing Landscape Paintings from the National Museum of China’, and to embark on a visual and spiritual journey through Chinese aesthetics”.

Leong added that landscape painting

during the Ming and Qing dynasties represented a pinnacle of traditional Chinese art, reflecting the philosophical concept of harmony between humanity and nature, while also influencing modern aesthetic development.

The exhibition incorporates digital elements, including a virtual reality (VR) experience of “Eight Views of Peking” and digital displays of works such as “Emperor Qianlong’s Southern Tour”, creating an interactive dialogue between traditional art and modern technology. A series of outreach activities will be held alongside the exhibition, including lectures, concerts, workshops, and guided tours.

Meanwhile, according to a statement by

the bureau, a thematic lecture on “Emperor Qianlong’s Southern Tour” was held on Saturday, with additional public programmes continuing throughout the exhibition period.

With free admission, the exhibition runs through July 26, aiming to promote appreciation of traditional Chinese culture in Macau, while striving to reinforce the city’s role as a platform for cultural exchange and artistic development.

Exhibitiongoers keen to admire the works can visit the museum from Tuesday to Sunday, including public holidays, from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., with the last entry at 6:30 p.m. It is closed on Mondays. More information can be found on <https://www.mam.gov.mo/>.

Photos: Khalel Vallo



Liaison deputy chief urges local officials to enhance ability in 7 aspects

Continued from p.1

During yesterday's session, Zhang said that Macau currently enjoys two major types of development opportunities. The solid advancement of Chinese modernisation is providing Macau with a historic opportunity for its development, while the solid foundations and achievements that Macau has enjoyed since its return to the motherland have provided important opportunities for its transition towards higher-quality and more innovative development, Zhang said.

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

4 problems

However, Zhang said, Macau must tackle four problems currently hindering its further development.

First, Zhang said, while Macau has achieved significant results in serving the nation's development, its potential has yet to be further realised, adding that this situation is partially due to Macau's ongoing public administration reform still failing to reach the desired level.

Second, Zhang said, while the local government has achieved positive results in planning and advancing its 1+4 appropriate economic diversification plan, the long-standing dominance of a single industry in Macau remains largely unchanged.

The local government's 1+4 model aims to consolidate and diversify the development of the city's tourism and leisure industry, i.e., the "1" element, while putting special emphasis on promoting the development of four new key industries, i.e., the "4" elements,



Local officials and public servants attend yesterday's session at the University of Macau's (UM) University Hall. — Photo: Tony Wong

namely +1) big health mainly driven by traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), +2) modern finance, +3) high-tech, and +4) MICE and commerce as well as culture and sport.

Third, Zhang said, while the first-phase development goals of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin were achieved as scheduled in 2024, the island's institutional development and alignment with Macau remains inadequate.

Fourth, Zhang said, in terms of improving residents' well-being, while Macau's social welfare has reached a level among the top in the world, residents' sense of gain remains insufficient.

Zhang said that Macau generally does not lack employment opportunities, but structural contradictions are prominent. It is common for highly educated individuals in Macau to hold low-skilled positions, and the opportunities

available in Macau for young people to fully realise their potential have yet to be expanded, he said.

Zhang also said that the channels available for residents to express their demands are still "not smooth enough".

Seven aspects

Zhang also said Macau officials and public servants must enhance their capabilities in seven aspects.

The **first** is to enhance coordination capacity to integrate and serve the nation's overall development.

The **second**, Zhang said, is to enhance the ability to adapt to changes. He said that local officials and public servants must enhance their ability to adapt to the emergence of various new concepts and new knowledge brought about by the global technological advancement.

Third, Zhang said, officials must also go into neighbourhoods to conduct on-site investigations and

grasp first-hand information instead of only sitting in the office.

The **fourth**, Zhang said, is to enhance the ability to strike the right balance between the interests of different parties in Macau's civil society.

The **fifth**, Zhang said, is to enhance problem-solving ability with the aim of advancing Macau's appropriate economic diversification.

Sixth, Zhang said, officials must enhance their emergency response capacity to prevent and resolve various types of risks in civil society.

Seventh, Zhang said, officials must enhance their ability to ensure that Macau's various development plans will be correctly executed and implemented.

Wong raises 5 suggestions

During yesterday's session, Wong raised five suggestions for officials and public servants concerning their duties to enhance Macau's governance level and advance public administration reform.

The **first** is to accurately grasp the reform spirit and apply it to their work. He said that it is essential to deeply study the spirit of the two sessions and the central authorities' requirements, firmly establish a holistic perspective, and plan and advance their own work within the context of the MSAR's overall reform agenda.

The **second** is to cooperate with the government's reform efforts and strengthen cross-departmental collaboration. From an overall perspective, public entities should proactively coordinate, collaborate closely, remove bottlenecks, and work together to ensure the smooth progress of the government's reform tasks, achieving efficient operation of Macau's governance system.

The **third** is to break through rigid thinking patterns and drive reform with innovation. It is necessary to transcend traditional mindsets, proactively innovate ideas and methods, and introduce new approaches and measures in management, services, and policy implementation.

The **fourth** is to demonstrate a sense of responsibility and dedication to ensure that reform is implemented. Officials must personally deploy and oversee reform tasks, ensuring clear goals, detailed work plans, and well-defined responsibilities to guarantee that reforms are implemented faithfully and effectively.

The **fifth** is to remain committed to the original aspiration of serving the people and work diligently for their well-being. This commitment must be transformed into action by improving the quality and efficiency of public services and building a clean, efficient, and people-orientated government. ■

Tap Siac Craft Market opens again Thursday

Rui Pastorin

This year's Tap Siac Craft Market in Spring returns for its second consecutive weekend in Praça do Tap Seac (塔石廣場) this Thursday, with the event lasting through Sunday.

Over 90 percent of the participating cultural and creative entities will be different to last week, again showcasing a variety of products ranging from daily necessities and handicrafts to clothing and accessories, according to a statement from the bureau yesterday.

There will again be a raft of workshops, alongside more performances by singers from the Chinese mainland, Macau, and Hong Kong, with the schedule of performances available on: <https://www.craftmarket.gov.mo/en/concert/58>

This edition of the annual fair, which started in 2008, kicked off last Thursday. Joining it this year are over 200 handicraft and gastronomy stalls run by cultural and creative entities from the



This photo provided by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) yesterday shows a sign with the schedule of the two-weekend-long Tap Siac Craft Market.

Chinese mainland, Macau, Hong Kong and China's Taiwan region, as well as Malaysia, Thailand and South Korea, according to the statement.

One can visit the event from 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. on Thursday, while it will be open from 3 p.m. to 10 p.m.

from May 1, Labour Day, through its final day on Sunday, May 3.

More details can be found on www.craftmarket.gov.mo and www.icm.gov.mo. One can also visit the Macao Craft Market Facebook page on www.facebook.com/MacaoCraftMarket ■

主辦單位: 贊助單位: 澳門基金會 協辦單位: 大噏三巴廟

蓮關三宴 · 潮宴

時間 TIME

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

Macao chief executive's Europe visit highlights SAR's bridge role, say experts

MACAU – The recent visit by Chief Executive of the Macao Special Administrative Region (SAR) Sam Hou Fai to Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, and Belgium has bolstered Macao's exchanges and cooperation, highlighting its role as a bridge between Chinese and international markets, said experts at home and abroad.

Sam, leading a Macao SAR delegation, departed the city on April 17 and wrapped up the tour on Sunday.

UNIQUE BRIDGE ROLE

In Lisbon, the chief executive met with Portuguese President António José Seguro and other leading officials in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. Sam briefed the Portuguese side on the successful practice of "One Country, Two Systems" in Macao.

Carmen Amado Mendes, president of the Macao Scientific

and Cultural Center (Lisbon), said Macao holds a distinctive position in China-Portugal relations, as it is "a place where China and Portugal have long known each other well historically," making it "an especially useful platform for political, economic, academic, and cultural exchanges."

Bernardo Mendia, secretary-general of the Portugal-China Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said Macao's advantages under "One Country, Two Systems" principle provide a familiar business environment for Portuguese-speaking companies seeking access to the Chinese market.

Francisco José Leandro, associate professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Macau, said that "by mobilizing historical, linguistic, and institutional assets, Macao has positioned itself as a functional connector linking China with the European Union, Portuguese- and

Spanish-speaking countries, and the multilateral trading system."

EXPANDING MARKET REACH

Addressing the press, the chief executive noted a fruitful harvest of 61 agreements signed in Portugal by the Macao SAR government and business delegations, covering areas such as trade, technology, tourism, and education. A total of 48 of those were inked in Spain, covering high technology, overseas expansion of exhibition brands, and sports events.

Lao Chi Ngai, president of the Macao Economic Association, said the inclusion of Spain in the itinerary marks a key step in expanding Macao's role from a bridge with Portuguese-speaking countries to a broader platform covering both Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking regions.

Mendia said the visit to Spain demonstrates Macao's intention to broaden cooperation to Spanish-

speaking markets, creating opportunities to transform Macao's potential into tangible economic outcomes.

Carlos Cid Álvares, president of the Macao delegation of the Portugal-China Chamber of Commerce and Industry, told Xinhua that Macao can serve as a "dual-language platform" linking Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking markets, offering legal, linguistic, and institutional support.

BOOSTING PRACTICAL COOPERATION

The business delegation comprising entrepreneurs from Macao and the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, along with representatives of other mainland enterprises, conducted a six-day business exchange visit to Portugal and Spain, according to the Macao SAR government.

Álvares said the trip of the official and business representatives

is expected to center on "platform-based acceleration." The "Macao + Hengqin" synergy involves a two-way flow – assisting Chinese enterprises in "going global," particularly into Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking markets, while also attracting foreign investment to the Chinese mainland.

According to Mendes, Macao already plays an important role in trade fairs, business missions, and the circulation of commercial information, and could further expand its role in financial services, innovation, and cooperation with the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

Leandro said Macao's development should be viewed within the broader context of the Greater Bay Area (GBA) and China's high-level opening-up, with the city playing an increasingly important role in trade facilitation, professional services, and international connectivity.

– Xinhua

Chinese EV carries forward China-Britain cultural connection in Shakespeare's hometown

Analysis

LONDON/NANCHANG – A BYD Dolphin rolled slowly through Stratford-upon-Avon, the hometown of William Shakespeare, passing the Peony Pavilion, a Chinese-style garden structure in the town center with red pillars and upturned eaves glowing in the afternoon sun.

More than 400 years ago, Chinese playwright Tang Xianzu's *The Peony Pavilion* and Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* appeared in roughly the same era. Today, the Chinese electric vehicle (EV) made in Tang's hometown of Fuzhou in east China's Jiangxi province has arrived in Shakespeare's town.

The scene brought together two places linked first by culture and now increasingly by industry. A broader story has been unfolded on cultural exchange extended into modern manufacturing and low-carbon cooperation between China and Britain.

The Dolphin in Stratford-upon-Avon rolled off a BYD production line in Fuzhou where theater has become one of the bridges to the outside world.

The seventh Tang Xianzu International Theatre Exchange Month which was held recently in Fuzhou drew more than 1,000 scholars, theatre professionals and enthusiasts from China and abroad.

Productions including English-language *Peony Pavilion*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Nanke, and Tang and Shakespeare explored new possibilities for dialogue between Eastern and Western dramatic traditions.

Michael Dobson, director of the Shakespeare Institute at

the University of Birmingham, brought an English-language version of *The Peony Pavilion* from Stratford-upon-Avon to Fuzhou. He said the production, with Chinese actors playing Du Liniang and Irish actors playing Liu Mengmei, was meant to help Tang's drama reach a wider audience. "We are presenting this Chinese play in the way we perform Shakespeare," he said.

As cultural ties deepen, industrial links have followed. In BYD's vehicle plant in Fuzhou, robotic arms move in steady rhythm as new energy vehicles come off the production line. As one of China's leading makers of new energy vehicles, BYD sold more than 4.6 million such vehicles worldwide in 2025, including more than 2.25 million battery electric vehicles, both topping global rankings.

For inland Fuzhou, a new logistics channel has been opened. The Fuzhou International Land Port officially started operation in late January this year, activating a corridor linking inland production with rail lines, seaports and overseas markets.

Britain, for its part, has taken up measures for energy transition, which has provided a broad prospect for the new energy vehicles.

George Cowcher, deputy leader of Stratford-on-Avon District Council, said, "Stratford-on-Avon has always been a tourist destination, really, for the last 150 years." He added that the town had long attracted overseas visitors and, in more recent years, had also seen significant numbers of tourists from China.

For Cowcher, the town's challenge is to remain both historic and alive. He said, "This town has a population of 30,000 people itself, and it has to operate as a town."

The balance between heritage and daily life also helps explain why new forms of cooperation can take root here. Britain's green transition is opening fresh space for electric vehicles and related industries.

At the University of Warwick, a multi-million-pound charging network project has been completed, with 142 charging points installed across the campus. Near Coventry, not far from Shakespeare's home county, a 2.5-billion-pound investment plan is under way at the former Coventry Airport site, which is expected to become one of Britain's largest battery manufacturing bases.

The BYD Dolphin's owner, Luke Collins, chose the Chinese-made new energy vehicle in late 2024. He said it met his needs for daily commuting and short-distance travel, and he was satisfied with both the charging cost and the driving experience.

"Now you can also see electric buses in London," he said. "I hope British and Chinese companies can continue to deepen cooperation in green technology."

In Fuzhou, BYD is also looking ahead. Deng Peng, who manages BYD's business in Jiangxi, said the company plans to turn its local production base into a zero-carbon industrial park through technological innovation and better energy management.

– Xinhua



Farmers release large yellow croaker fries into fish farming platforms at a mariculture farm in Xiapu County, Ningde, Fujian Province, on Saturday. Rising temperatures have ushered in the prime period for release of seedlings in spring at Ningde's mariculture zone for large yellow croakers. Farmers here are expected to release about 2.5 billion fries during this time window when seawater temperatures stabilize at around 12 degrees Celsius. Ningde serves as a major production base for large yellow croakers in the country, contributing 8 out of every 10 farmed large yellow croakers nationwide. The city's output of large yellow croakers hit 222,440 tonnes in 2025, garnering a combined output value of over 20 billion yuan for the entire industrial line here.

– Xinhua

HK CE Lee meets with Belgian deputy prime minister

HONG KONG – Chief Executive of China's Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) John Lee Ka-chiu yesterday met with Belgium's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Maxime Prévot to exchange views on boosting bilateral cooperation.

Noting that Belgium is one of Hong Kong's major trading partners in the European Union, Lee expressed confidence that the two sides will advance collaboration in areas such as economic and trade investment, innovation and technology (I&T), and people-to-people exchanges.

Overseas enterprises, including those from Belgium, can use Hong

Kong as a platform to tap into the mainland market and other Asian markets by leveraging its professional and high value-added services, highly market-oriented business environment and low and simple tax regime, said Lee.

Lee recommended Northern Metropolis, a new engine for Hong Kong's economy, as a destination for Belgian companies to set up offices so that they can combine Hong Kong's robust research and development capabilities and vibrant I&T ecosystem with their technologies, talent pool and industrial chain resources.

Prévot is visiting China this week, according to the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

– Xinhua

Draft law eyes wider maternity insurance access

BEIJING – Chinese lawmakers are revising a provision in the draft healthcare security law to specify that the country will improve the maternity insurance system and broaden its coverage.

The draft law is now under a second deliberation at a session of the National People's Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC) that began yesterday.

The draft stipulates that those covered by maternity insurance will receive benefits for childbirth-related medical expenses and maternity allowances, as stipulated by national regulations. Non-employed spouses will receive coverage for childbirth-related medical expenses.

The move comes as China has stepped up efforts in recent years to extend maternity insurance to people in flexible employment, with some parts of the country, from northeast China's Jilin Province to south China's Hainan Province, already implementing the reform. Currently, 255 million people in China are enrolled in the scheme.

Thanks to the rapid development of information technology, a large number of people in China are now working on their own terms – as delivery riders, ride-hailing drivers, or freelancers – bringing the total number of flexible workers to more than 200 million. Officials say flexible work is creating new job opportunities and giving fresh momentum to economic growth.

By enshrining reforms to improve and expand maternity insurance in the draft law, more people, especially those in flexible employment, will be covered by maternity insurance, said Liu Xuanlin, deputy director of the medical security law and policy research center of China University of Political Science and Law and deputy secretary-general of the China Health Law Society.

“This protects their reproductive and health rights, lowers their medical costs, and could help boost their willingness to have children,” he added.

Li Hui, a resident of Haikou in Hainan, is self-employed but enrolled in maternity insurance. It cost her just 80 yuan to give birth last year because most of the cost was covered.

After finding out that the reform will be written into law, she said: “With maternity insurance coverage expanding, people like me will have greater protections, which will allow us to feel more at ease and more reassured.”

At present, flexible workers across China can voluntarily enroll in two types of social security – basic old-age insurance and basic medical insurance for employees. Now, a third – maternity insurance – is gradually being added to the list, without increasing their premiums.

Liu said bringing flexible workers under the umbrella of social insurance reflects the

government's people-centered approach to social governance and its commitment to making the system fair and accessible for all.

“The core is a return to institutional respect for the dignity and family well-being of every worker,” he said.

Behind the provision also lies a demographic challenge facing China. Since 2022, China's population has been shrinking, while the number of elderly people has continued to climb.

Experts believe the change to the draft will help gradually raise the birth rate and improve the country's population structure.

In recent years, the government has introduced a series of policies to boost the birth rate, including childcare subsidies, housing support, expanded nursery services and encouraging flexible working arrangements.

Population expert Dong Yuzheng said the hope is that the policies will encourage society to recognize the social value of marriage and childbearing, while continuing to build a more family-friendly society.

In addition to maternity insurance, the draft law also adds a provision stating that the country encourages the development of commercial health insurance, charitable donations related to healthcare and mutual medical aid, in order to meet diverse health security needs.

“This revision clarifies the top-level design of China's healthcare insurance system from a legal perspective,” said Zhang Qing, a professor at the China University of Political Science and Law.

He explained that the healthcare insurance system is a multi-layered, complementary system of protection, where basic medical insurance plays the lead role, supported by critical illness insurance and medical assistance as a safety net, with commercial health insurance, charitable donations and mutual medical aid working together.

He added that the change also leaves room for the future development of long-term care insurance, making the entire medical security net more comprehensive and more sustainable.

The draft also stipulates that efforts should be made to coordinate local governments to establish a risk control mechanism for the basic medical insurance fund, and develop a medium-to-long-term revenue-expenditure balance mechanism as well as an emergency response mechanism.

According to experts, the new emergency response mechanism for funds is mainly aimed at dealing with the risk of revenue falling short of expenditure in some regions' resident medical insurance schemes, and at strengthening the responsibility of local authorities to balance their budgets.

– Xinhua

China commends Moody's affirmation of its A1 credit rating, outlook upgrade

BEIJING – The finance ministry yesterday commended Moody's decision to affirm China's A1 sovereign credit rating and upgrade its credit outlook to stable.

A ministry official said that this rating has reflected Moody's recognition of the strong resilience demonstrated by China's macroeconomic and fiscal strength amid external shocks, as well as new drivers and progress in the country's high-quality economic development.

According to the official, China's economy exceeded market expectations to achieve a rapid growth rate of 5 percent in the first quarter of 2026, explaining that against the backdrop of a rapidly changing global trade environment and continuously rising geopolitical risks, the Chinese government has implemented a package of macroeconomic regulation policies and strengthened policy coordination.

The Chinese economy has withstood pressure and moved toward innovation-led growth and optimized economic structure while demonstrating the advantages of a supersized market, a complete supply chain system and strong export competitiveness, said the official, noting that these are the cornerstones supporting China's sovereign creditworthiness.

“We will further comprehensively deepen reforms, continue to promote economic structural transformation, steadily enhance fiscal sustainability, accelerate the cultivation and expansion of new quality productive forces, and consolidate the foundation for stable economic operation,” the official said.

By leveraging the certainty of its sustained and sound economic and social development, China will contribute more to world economic recovery and prosperity, the official added.

– Xinhua

Vice premier urges regular assistance, consolidation of poverty alleviation

BEIJING – Vice Premier Liu Guozhong yesterday urged efforts to steadily advance regular assistance and continue to consolidate and expand the achievements of poverty alleviation.

Continuous efforts must be made to guard against any large-scale lapse or relapse into poverty, Liu, who is also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, said at a related conference in Beijing.

Noting that 2026 is the first year that regular assistance has been implemented, Liu urged action to strengthen targeted and

timely assistance, prioritize development-based assistance, and provide employment assistance through multiple channels.

He stressed the need to provide more support for underdeveloped areas, further improve the social security system, as well as enhance the effectiveness of cooperation between the eastern and western regions and targeted support from central departments.

Eight provincial regions of east China signed assistance agreements with 10 western provincial regions at the conference.

– Xinhua



Stranded residents are evacuated by boat in Qinzhou, Guangxi, yesterday. The region was lashed by heavy rain, causing widespread flooding.

– Xinhua

139th Canton Fair attracts 245,000 foreign buyers in first 2 phases

GUANGZHOU – The first two phases of the 139th China Import and Export Fair, also known as the Canton Fair, have attracted 245,000 overseas buyers from 219 countries and regions as of Monday afternoon, an increase of 2.2 percent from the same period of the previous edition, according to the China Foreign Trade Center.

A total of 140 overseas industrial and commercial organizations attended the fair. Another 344 leading enterprises from the United States, Mexico, the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan and other places also participated, marking a 4.9 percent increase from the same period of the previous edition.

This year's fair is being held in three offline

phases in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong Province, and will run until May 5.

The second phase, held from April 23 to 27, focuses on “quality home life,” including building materials, furniture, household products, gifts and decorations. The third phase, scheduled for Friday to next Tuesday, will focus on toys, maternity and childcare products, home textiles, stationery, as well as health and leisure goods.

Established in 1957, the Canton Fair takes place twice a year in Guangzhou. It is the longest-running of several comprehensive international trade events in China, and it has been hailed as the barometer of China's foreign trade.

– Xinhua

Philippine police bust illegal cigarette network in Philippines

MANILA – Police have dismantled a large-scale illegal cigarette manufacturing and distribution network in the Philippines, seizing nearly 800 million pesos (about US\$13 million) worth of raw materials and equipment, local media reported on Saturday.

The Philippine National Police (PNP) carried out the seizure earlier this week. The illegal operation had been active since the third quarter of 2025, according to Jonvic Remulla, secretary of the Department of the

Interior and Local Government.

Remulla emphasized the significance of the seizure, noting that such operations deprive the government of billions of pesos in excise tax revenues intended for public healthcare and other essential social services.

He added that authorities have already shut down similar operations in Luzon and will intensify enforcement efforts in the Visayas region in the coming months.

– Xinhua

French teen faces jail in Singapore for licking vending machine

SINGAPORE – A French teenager has been charged with mischief and public nuisance in Singapore for licking a straw and putting it back in an orange juice vending machine, court documents showed yesterday.

Didier Gaspard Owen Maximilien, 18, allegedly filmed himself “licking a straw and placing it back at the vending machine”, uploaded the video on Instagram knowing that it “would or would probably cause annoyance to the public”, according to the documents.

The teenager is studying in Singapore, according to court records.

The public nuisance offence carries a jail term of up to three months and a fine.

A second charge of committing mischief

said Maximilien knew that he was “likely to cause wrongful loss or damage” to iJooz, the company operating the vending machine which had to replace all 500 straws in the dispenser.

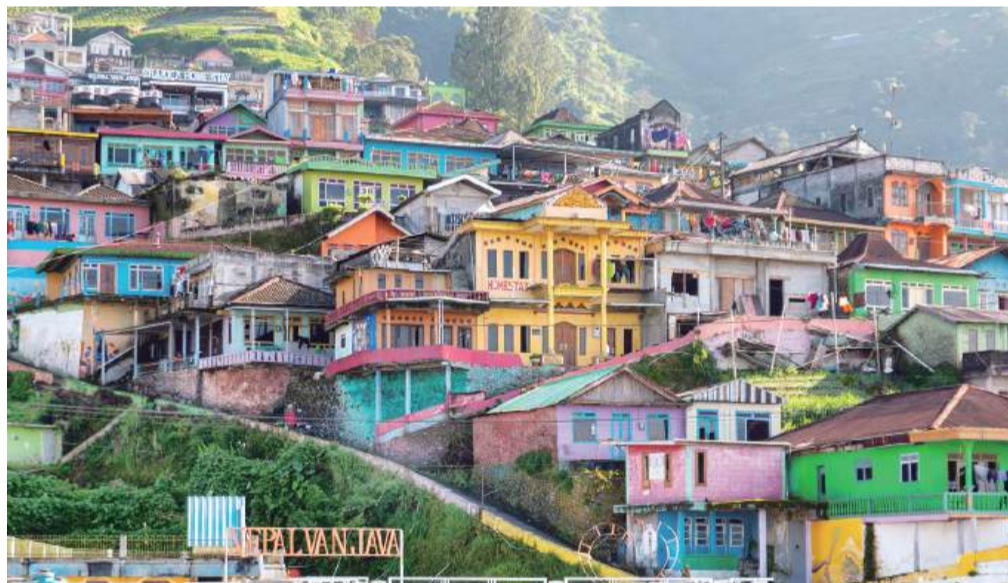
The mischief offence carries a punishment of up to two years in jail on conviction and a fine, according to the charge sheet.

Both offences were allegedly committed on March 12.

The charges were lodged before a district court last Friday, and the next hearing will be on May 22.

The *Straits Times* newspaper said the video “quickly went viral, sparking shock and concern among netizens”.

– AFP



A general view shows colourful houses in Butuh village, popularly known as Nepal Van Java, or Nepal of Java, for its resemblance to hillside villages in Nepal, on the slopes of Mount Sumbing in Magelang, Central Java, Indonesia yesterday.

– AFP

Thailand seizes 1.3 million counterfeit goods in 6-month crackdown

BANGKOK – Thailand’s government yesterday announced the seizure of over 1.3 million counterfeit items during a six-month nationwide crackdown on intellectual property infringement, a move aimed at boosting international trade and investor confidence.

In the first half of the 2026 fiscal year through March, Thai authorities handled 332 intellectual property infringement cases, according to the Ministry of Finance. Authorities seized over 1.3 million items, with estimated economic damages exceeding 2.3 billion baht (about US\$71.19 million).

Speaking at a press conference, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Ekniti Nitithanprapas emphasized that these results reflect the country’s coordinated, result-driven approach in safeguarding fair trade, protecting consumers, and reinforcing its economic integrity.

Deputy Prime Minister and Commerce

Minister Suphaje Suthumpun said counterfeit goods directly impact manufacturers and the broader public, citing health and safety risks to consumers and the severe disadvantage it creates for honest businesses unable to compete with illicit pricing.

Suphaje reaffirmed the government’s commitment to strict law enforcement and close collaboration with private-sector right holders through initiatives such as proactive consumer awareness campaigns, updated legislation to match the modern economy, and direct cooperation with e-commerce platforms to intercept online infringement.

She noted that the overarching goal is to elevate Thailand’s intellectual property protection to international standards, positioning the Southeast Asian nation as a premier trade and investment hub that respects fair trade rules and fosters innovation for both local and foreign creators.

– Xinhua

Old bombs found at Philippines main airport: local media

MANILA – Construction workers alerted police and airport authorities after uncovering several old, corroded bomb items during excavation at the Juliet Extension Taxiway within the Ninoy Aquino International Airport complex on Sunday, according to local media reports yesterday.

According to local media *Philippine Star* yesterday, explosive ordnance disposal experts from the Philippine National Police Aviation Security Group (AVSEGROUP) conducted a safety assessment, and successfully recovered 10 50-pound inert general-purpose bombs and 18 25-pound inert general-purpose bombs.

The recovered ordnance was transported to the AVSEGROUP headquarters for proper handling and safekeeping. A similar recovery operation took place on April 22, following the discovery of old military items during excavation in the same complex, according to the report.

– Xinhua



This photo taken on Sunday shows some old and corroded bomb items uncovered during excavation at the Juliet Extension Taxiway within the Ninoy Aquino International Airport complex in Pasay City, the Philippines.

– Xinhua

Japan startup seeks approval of cat kidney disease treatment

TOKYO – A Japanese startup has filed for approval of a new drug to treat chronic kidney disease in cats, the founder said yesterday, offering hope for a common affliction that currently has no definitive cure.

The Tokyo-based Institute for AIM Medicine filed the treatment with the agriculture ministry on Friday, researcher Toru Miyazaki said, after a trial showed the drug significantly extended the life of afflicted cats.

“Most cats suffer from chronic kidney disease, and many die from end-stage renal failure or uraemia,” Miyazaki, a former professor of the University of Tokyo, told AFP.

“We undertook drug development with the aim of overcoming this situation and alleviating the financial and physical burden on both cats and their owners,” he said.

Miyazaki’s research came under spotlight five years ago when he had to

halt the development of the drug due to a shortage of research funding during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Following media reports, he received a flood of donations from cat lovers and owners totalling nearly 300 million yen (US\$2 million) between 2021 and 2022.

Chronic kidney disease is common among older cats, affecting up to 40 percent of felines aged more than 10, and 80 percent of those over 15, according to Cornell Feline Health Center in the US.

It is “a progressive disease with no definitive cure”, the centre said.

Miyazaki’s study, published in the *Veterinary Journal* in February, tracked 11 cats that received the treatment and 15 non-treated cats for a year.

The cumulative survival rate for the treated cats was between 80 and 83 percent, while it was 20 percent for the non-treated cats.

– AFP

6.2 quake on Hokkaido island latest to shake Japan

TOKYO – A strong earthquake rattled Japan’s northern island of Hokkaido early yesterday, US and Japanese meteorological agencies reported, the latest in a series of powerful tremors to hit the island nation.

The 6.2-magnitude quake struck at 5:23 a.m. [local time] in Hokkaido’s southern region, at a depth of 83 kilometres, the Japanese Meteorological Agency reported, revising its preliminary estimate of magnitude 6.1.

No tsunami alert was issued, JMA said, and the US Geological Survey predicted that damage to property and threat to life was minimal, given the limited population in the region some 200 kilometres east of Sapporo.

But “in areas that experienced strong shaking, the danger of falling rocks and landslides has increased,” a JMA official told reporters.

JMA also warned that risks of experiencing more quakes of a similar strength in the area in the coming week are high.

Hours earlier, a magnitude 5.0 earthquake occurred in the sea a few hundred kilometres south of Hokkaido.

The temblors come less than a week after the JMA warned of an increased risk

of a megaquake – 8.0 magnitude or stronger – after last Monday’s 7.7 earthquake off northern Iwate prefecture.

Six people were reported injured as a result of that quake, which shook large buildings in Tokyo, hundreds of kilometres from the epicentre.

In addition, 80-centimetre tsunami waves lashed a port in Iwate, while small waves also hit elsewhere in northern Japan.

Afterward, the JMA said “the likelihood of a new, huge earthquake occurring is relatively higher than during normal times”.

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

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

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

– AFP

Steep mountainside offers respite for daring Afghans

Rashid Stanikzai

KAPISA PROVINCE, AFGHANISTAN – Backflipping down a steep and sandy mountainside, Afghan teenager Imran Saeedi wows the crowds of men who gather each springtime to unwind beside breathtaking views.

Hundreds of visitors travel each weekend to Reg-e-Rawan – “the moving sands” in Dari – to practice parkour or roll down the honey-coloured sand in Kapisa province.

“I feel afraid when I’m going for a flip or a jump, and of course I can get injured,” said 16-year-old Saeedi, who nonetheless loves the thrill.

“When the week starts, I’m just waiting for the weekend so I can come to Reg-e-Rawan to have fun again,” said the high school student.

Men and boys clapped in admiration as he ran down the hill and flipped forwards, then backwards, while his friends filmed on their phones.

Less daring onlookers sat atop rocks surrounding the mountain, picnicking together and enjoying the scenery.

Reg-e-Rawan is off limits to women and girls, who are banned by the Taliban authorities from recreational spots such as parks.

Families with women were turned away when AFP journalists visited, while officials under the Ministry for the Propagation of

Virtue and the Prevention of Vice patrolled the area.

‘Humans need nature’

Mirwais Kamran, a 48-year-old businessman, had driven three hours north from the capital Kabul with some of his 12 children.

“I feel joy when I come here with my children and friends,” said Kamran, who climbed up the slope but stopped short of rolling down.

Nusratullah Nusrat, the provincial head of tourism at the Kapisa Department of Information and Culture, said the site dates back thousands of years.

“The unique feature of this place is that the sand never decreases despite people climbing up and sliding down,” he told AFP.

Some people believe rolling in the sand also helps treat rheumatism, added Nusrat.

For visitors such as Nohzatullah Ahmadzai, who travelled from Kabul with a group of friends, Reg-e-Rawan lifts his mood.

“I’m someone who gets depressed when I’m sad, so visiting such places erases that feeling,” said the 22-year-old, who works for a cargo firm.

Climbing the slope takes about an hour, rewarding visitors with views over green fields dotted with villages.

“We humans need nature,” said Ahmadzai. “When we feel stressed, we can visit natural places for relaxation or relief.” – AFP



An Afghan visitor backflips down a steep and sandy mountainside on a weekend at the Sayad area of Reg-e-Rawan in Kapisa province, Afghanistan on Friday. – AFP

Pakistan issues new transit of goods order to facilitate regional trade

ISLAMABAD – Pakistan has introduced a new framework allowing transit of goods to Iran through its territory, opening designated trade corridors under a newly issued transit trade order, the Ministry of Commerce said yesterday.

The development came as the government implemented the “Transit of Goods Through Pakistan Order 2026,” aimed at facilitating smoother cargo movement and strengthening trade links with Iran.

According to the ministry, multiple routes passing through key locations in the southwestern areas of Gwadar and Taftan, as well as the southern port city of

Karachi, have been designated as transit corridors, forming an integrated network for goods destined for Iran.

The country’s Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan said that the initiative is a significant step toward promoting regional trade and enhancing Pakistan’s role as a key trade corridor.

“This move will strengthen Pakistan’s strategic importance and improve regional connectivity,” the minister said.

Officials noted that the designated land routes are expected to streamline logistics, reduce bottlenecks, and ensure more efficient transportation in accordance with customs regulations. – Xinhua

Kim reaffirms support for Russia’s ‘sacred’ Ukraine war

Jihye Shin and Matthew Walsh

SEOUL – North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has reaffirmed Pyongyang’s support for Russia’s military operation in Ukraine, vowing to help Moscow achieve victory in its “sacred” war, state media reported yesterday.

Pyongyang has sent missiles, munitions and thousands of troops to assist Russia in Ukraine, and analysts say Moscow is sending financial aid, military technology, food and energy to the diplomatically isolated country in return.

A string of high-level Russian officials has visited North Korea in recent days, with Defence Minister Andrey Belousov meeting Kim on Sunday, according to official statements.

North Korea “will as ever fully support the policy of the Russian Federation to defend the national sovereignty, territorial integrity and security interests”, Kim told Belousov, according to the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA).

Kim expressed “belief that the Russian army and people would surely win a victory in the just sacred war”, KCNA reported.

Both sides said their delegations had discussed deeper military ties, with Belousov saying Moscow was ready to sign a cooperation plan covering the period from 2027 to 2031.

Kim, Belousov and Russian parliamentary speaker Vyacheslav Volodin also attended the opening ceremony of a memorial complex honouring North Korean soldiers killed in Ukraine.

In a speech, Kim paid tribute to their “unrivalled bravery, mass heroism, indomitable fighting spirit and noble sacrifice”, KCNA said.

He took part in a ceremony to bury the war dead, recalling their “last heroic moments” and covering the remains of a soldier with earth.

The inauguration also included a



This picture taken on Sunday and released by North Korea’s official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) via KNS yesterday shows North Korean leader Kim Jong Un laying a wreath at the memorial tower for fallen troops of the Korean People’s Army’s special operations at the Memorial Museum of Combat Feats at the Overseas Military Operations in Pyongyang. – AFP

concert, a fireworks display and an air force flyover, KCNA reported.

The audience were moved by portrayals of “life-and-death bloody battles” and “death-defying hand-to-hand fights and heroic suicidal explosions the young soldiers chose without hesitation”, it said.

North Korea and Russia signed a military treaty in 2024, obligating both states to provide military assistance “without delay” in the event of an attack on the other.

‘Brilliant war results’

The opening of the memorial coincides with the first anniversary of Moscow’s recovery of parts of Kursk, a region in Russia where Ukraine launched a major counteroffensive starting in mid-2024.

North Korean soldiers were deployed in the area to help beat back the Ukrainian advance.

In his meeting with Belousov, Kim hailed the “brilliant war results in liberating Kursk”, according to KCNA.

Russian President Vladimir Putin praised the “extraordinary bravery and genuine devotion” of North Korean troops in a letter to Kim that was published by KCNA.

Seoul estimates about 2,000

North Koreans have been killed in the Ukraine war.

North Korean troops are said to have been instructed to kill themselves rather than be captured in battle.

Only two North Korean soldiers have been taken alive and are currently in custody of Ukrainian authorities.

Olive branch shunned

In contrast with its ties with Russia, North Korea has called South Korea its “most hostile” adversary despite Seoul’s efforts at engagement.

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung said yesterday that it was “the destiny of both the South and the North to make the flowers of peace bloom”.

He vowed to act “proactively” to restore trust with Pyongyang, adding: “We hope the North will trust the sincerity of our government and respond in kind.”

Lee’s comments marked the anniversary of the 2018 inter-Korean summit, at which Kim and South Korea’s then-president Moon Jae-in memorably crossed into the other country’s territory.

The summit yielded a declaration to work towards an official end to the Korean War, but was later suspended as bilateral tensions rose again. – AFP

Afghan govt say Pakistani fire kills 4 along border

ASADABAD, AFGHANISTAN – The Pakistani military killed at least four people and wounded 70 others in an Afghan border province yesterday, the Taliban government said.

Hundreds of people have been killed since the two neighbours went to war in late February, according to UN figures, although the violence has abated in recent weeks.

The Afghan government said Pakistani “mortars and rockets” hit Asadabad, the capital of eastern Kunar province, and another district.

“Seventy civilians, including 30 students, including women and children, were wounded and four others were martyred,” deputy government spokesman Hamdullah Fitrat posted on X.

Homes and a university were among the sites hit, Fitrat said.

Pakistan’s information ministry earlier denied attacking residential areas or the university, calling any such claim a “blatant lie”.

The Afghan government’s toll

raises an earlier figure of three killed and 45 wounded given by Kunar information chief Najibullah Hanif.

Pakistani mortar fire and airstrikes hit three districts as well as Asadabad, where university accommodation and a neighbourhood were struck, Hanif told AFP.

The latest reported violence follows fierce fighting along the frontier this year, as well as unprecedented Pakistani airstrikes on Afghan cities including the capital Kabul.

A days-long ceasefire was agreed in March, and mediator China later said the warring sides had agreed to avoid escalation.

However, Afghans have since reported sporadic violence.

“We’ve been in a bad situation for almost two months. Sometimes the fighting is intense, and sometimes it’s not,” Mushtaq Wazir, who lives in the border province of Paktika, told AFP.

He said one person was killed in clashes yesterday, and four others wounded at the weekend.

Suhbat Katwazi, from Barmal, the same district in Paktika, told AFP that yesterday’s death was caused by a mortar shell that hit the person’s home.

Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have been fraught since Taliban officials took power in Kabul for a second time in 2021.

Security issues have proved a sticking point, especially Pakistan’s demand that Afghanistan curb the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militant group.

Islamabad accuses the Taliban government of sheltering militants behind a surge in attacks, particularly the TTP which has waged a violent campaign against Pakistan for years.

Afghan officials deny the charge and counter that Pakistan harbours hostile groups and does not respect its sovereignty.

The border between the neighbours has remained largely closed since a flare-up in deadly violence in October, freezing bilateral trade. – AFP

Iran FM blames US for failure of talks as he meets with Putin

SAINT PETERSBURG – Iran's top diplomat blamed Washington yesterday for the failure of Middle East peace talks during a visit to Russia, where President Vladimir Putin promised him Moscow's support in bringing the war to a close.

Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi was in Saint Petersburg on the fourth leg of a whirlwind diplomatic tour, having sandwiched a trip to Oman in between two visits to main mediator Pakistan over the past few days.

Islamabad hosted the first and only round of unsuccessful US-Iran talks, and Araghchi's visit had fanned hopes for fresh negotiations over the weekend, until US President Donald Trump scrapped a planned trip by his envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner.

"The US approaches caused the previous round of negotiations, despite progress, to fail to reach its goals because of the excessive demands," Araghchi said yesterday.

After nixing his emissaries' trip, Trump told Fox News that if Iran wanted talks, "they can call us" – though he has said the cancellation does not signal a return to hostilities.

Following their meeting, Putin and Araghchi both voiced their commitment to the two countries' "strategic relationship".

Putin promised that Russia would "do everything that serves your interests... so that peace can be achieved", state media reported.

Araghchi said the war with the



Russian President Vladimir Putin (right) and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi arrive for a meeting at the Boris Yeltsin Presidential Library in Saint Petersburg yesterday.

– AFP

US and Israel had shown the world "Iran's true power" and the stability of its governing system.

But back home in Tehran, the outlook was more sober.

"Everything in the country is up in the air right now. I have not worked for a long time... Other people I am in contact with are not working either," said one small business owner named Farshad who spoke to Paris-based AFP journalists.

"The country is in complete economic collapse... The situation

has gotten really scary."

Economic pain

In a sign that back-channel diplomatic efforts were ongoing, the Fars news agency said Iran had passed "written messages" to the Americans via Pakistan spelling out red lines, including nuclear issues and the Strait of Hormuz.

US media outlet Axios – citing a US official and two other sources – reported on Sunday that Iran had sent a new proposal to end the war centred on reopening the

Strait of Hormuz and ending a US naval blockade there, with nuclear negotiations postponed.

Iranian state news agency IRNA cited the report without denying it.

Though the ceasefire has so far held, the war's economic shock waves have continued to reverberate.

Tehran resident Shervin said he was trying to keep his head up despite a lack of work, "but at the same time it is the first time that I have reached a point where I was late on my rent".

Iran has blockaded Hormuz, cutting off flows of oil, gas and fertiliser and sending prices soaring.

In response, the US has imposed a blockade of Iranian ports in the waterway and beyond.

Trump is facing domestic pressure to find an off-ramp as fuel prices rise, with midterm elections due in November and polls showing the war is unpopular among Americans.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards, however, have said they have no intention of easing their market-rattling chokehold.

Ebrahim Azizi, head of the national security commission in Iran's parliament, told state television yesterday that a proposed law for managing the strait would make the Islamic republic's armed forces the overseeing authority, with financial gains from the waterway to be paid in Iranian rial.

Gulf states are also suffering from the strait's closure after absorbing weeks of Iranian drone and missile barrages that shut their skies and damaged their vital oil and gas infrastructure during the war.

A senior UAE official yesterday criticised Gulf neighbours over what he called their weak stance on Iran.

Gulf monarchies have always had "difficult relations" with Tehran, presidential adviser Anwar Gargash said, but their longstanding policy of containment has "failed miserably, and we are now facing a major reassessment".

– AFP

Israel defence minister warns Hezbollah chief 'playing with fire'

JERUSALEM – Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz warned yesterday that Hezbollah's defiance would bring catastrophic consequences for Lebanon after the militant group's leader rejected proposed direct talks between the two countries.

Lebanon and Israel's US ambassadors held two meetings in Washington in recent weeks, the first of their kind in decades.

The first meeting led to a truce in the Israel-Hezbollah war that began last month, while Beirut has been preparing for direct negotiations with the aim of striking a peace deal with Israel. The two countries have officially been at war since 1948.

"Naim Qassem is playing with fire, and the fire will burn Hezbollah and all of Lebanon," Katz told UN envoy to Lebanon Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, according to a statement issued by his office.

"If the Lebanese government continues to take cover under the wing of the Hezbollah terrorist organisation – fire will break out and engulf the cedars of Lebanon."

Katz's remarks came shortly after Qassem declared that direct talks between Israel and Lebanon amounted to a "grave sin".

Katz said that Lebanese President Joseph Aoun was "gambling with



Relatives and friends grieve during the funeral of sergeant Idan Fooks, who was killed in combat in southern Lebanon, in Petah Tikva yesterday. The Israeli military said on Sunday that a soldier was killed in southern Lebanon, where a ceasefire has been in place since mid-April. Fooks, 19, died "during combat" in south Lebanon, while "an officer and three additional soldiers were severely injured".

– AFP

the future of Lebanon", adding that Israel would not accept a situation in which a ceasefire in Lebanon coexists with continued attacks on Israeli forces and communities in northern Israel.

He reiterated that "the Lebanese government must ensure that Hezbollah is disarmed, first of all south of the Litani up to the Blue Line, and afterwards throughout all of Lebanon," referring to the river that cuts through southern Lebanon.

Aoun yesterday said that the direct talks with Israel were aimed at ending the conflict with Hezbollah while accusing those who drew Lebanon into war of "treason", in an implicit rebuke of the Iran-backed armed group.

Hezbollah drew Lebanon into the Middle East war on March 2 by firing rockets towards Israel to avenge the killing of Iranian supreme leader Ali Khamenei in US-Israeli strikes.

– AFP

UN maritime agency rejects Hormuz tolls

LONDON – The head of the UN's maritime agency said yesterday there was "no legal basis" for imposing any fees for ships to pass through the Strait of Hormuz.

Shipping through the narrow strait has been strangled since the US and Israel attacked Iran in late February.

Iran has sealed off the passage, sharply cutting oil and gas flows and sending prices soaring, while the US has blockaded Iranian ports. Tehran has also said it wants to impose transit fees as part of any lasting peace deal.

"There's no legal basis for the introduction of any tax, any customs, or any fees for on straits for international navigation," IMO Secretary-General Arsenio Domínguez said at a press conference.

Iran's armed forces would have authority over the key shipping lane under the country's proposed law for managing the waterway, a top official said yesterday.

Ebrahim Azizi, head of the national security commission in Iran's parliament, told state TV the armed forces were already in control of the strait and were seeking to prohibit the passage of "hostile vessels".

– AFP

The bill also provides that financial gains from the strait would be paid in Iran's rial currency.

Speaking on the sidelines of an IMO maritime protection committee meeting, Domínguez said he was in contact with "all the countries of the region", including Iran.

He firmly rejected the idea that reopening the waterway could involve payment of any fees.

Domínguez also said a planned evacuation operation for around 20,000 seafarers currently stranded on vessels in the Gulf could only go ahead once the strait was fully secure.

The shipping lane remains a key sticking point in negotiations between Washington and Tehran, even as a fragile April 8 ceasefire continues to hold.

Meanwhile, talks among IMO members this week are focused on a different issue: efforts to revive negotiations on an ambitious plan to decarbonise the global shipping industry.

That measure was due to be adopted last October, but the United States – backed by Saudi Arabia, Russia, and other oil-producing countries – blocked the agreement, delaying it by a year.

German petrol price control law has backfired: economists

FRANKFURT AM MAIN – Price controls introduced at German petrol stations to shield motorists from spiking oil prices amid the Middle East war have had the opposite effect and driven up the average cost of fuel, economists said yesterday.

Economy and Energy Minister Katherina Reiche said in March that petrol stations would have to limit any price rises to once per day at noon to limit the effect of soaring energy prices after Iran effectively cut off about a fifth of the world's oil and gas supplies in response to US-Israeli attacks.

However, the law in fact boosted retailers' petrol margins by five to six cents a litre, according to economists at the ZEW institute and the Düsseldorf Institute for Competition Economics, who compared wholesale prices to the pump prices at 15,000 petrol stations.

News of the law's apparent failure comes as Germany's government under Chancellor Friedrich Merz, nearing a year in office, is struggling to revitalise a sluggish economy and a reform drive has sparked discord between Merz's conservative CDU/CSU and his centre-left coalition partners the SPD.

Looking at price data before and after the measure's introduction, the economists found that prices now spiked at noon before falling only gradually over the course of the day and bottoming out the next morning.

This leaves fewer windows during the day for drivers to snap up relatively cheap petrol compared to before the reform.

"The reform was successful in increasing price transparency but failed to reduce price levels," the economists said. "If anything, it had the opposite effect".

"Low-price windows become more salient and easier to anticipate. However, this simplification comes at a cost: prices are systematically elevated during the midday period," they added.

Retailers were making an additional five to six cents per litre on petrol, they calculated, with smaller petrol stations and independent businesses making the most.

The authors found no robust effect for diesel prices, however.

They speculated this may have been because of reduced demand from diesel owners who tend to drive further, faster price rises at the start of the crisis or because the price had approached the psychologically important threshold of 2.50 euros (US\$2.94) a litre.

Asked about the study at a regular press briefing, economy ministry spokesman Daniel Greve said it could only be indicative since it did not look at the actual amounts sold at different times of day.

"The study does not specify exactly what volumes are purchased at what price, but simply plots the price curve," he said.

"The law already lays down that we will carry out checks and we will of course keep a constant eye on the situation." – AFP

French presidential hopefuls put romance on the ballot

Baptiste Pace

PARIS – Two French politicians have opened up about their love lives in what seems to be a celebrity-press-friendly move laying the ground for a run at the presidency next year.

Gabriel Attal, who became France's youngest ever and first openly gay prime minister in 2024, was the latest to bare all in his first book that came out last week.

In it, the 37-year-old, who is soon expected to announce his bid for the country's top job, speaks at length about his private life.

He recounts his father's addictions and early death, the struggles of his divorced mother, as well as his sisters battling antisemitism or wage discrimination.

But he also devotes a chapter to "the man of my life", European commissioner and former minister Stéphane Séjourné.

"I have nothing to hide – and certainly not the man I love," the centrist politician writes in "En homme libre" (literally, "As a Free Man").

"But it is indeed for my struggles, my values, and my ideas that I want to forge my bond with the French people," he added.

Jordan Bardella, the leader of France's far-right party, has already written two books.

The 30-year-old is expected to run if veteran candidate Marine Le Pen is barred from office over an alleged fake jobs scandal in European Parliament.

But he made his most sensational splash to date earlier this month when glossy magazine *Paris Match* published images of him and his girlfriend Princess Maria Carolina of Bourbon-Two Sicilies, 22.

It claimed to have "stumbled upon" the conservatively dressed pair along the seaside in Corsica.

"We decided to stop hiding and to accept what, for us, has now become an obvious fact in our private life," he later told the France 2 evening news.

"I'm very happy," he added.



French far-right National Rally (RN) party leader Jordan Bardella attends a press conference in Porto, northern Portugal, last Wednesday. Bardella is among hopefuls in France's presidential election next year. – AFP



March 3, 2025 file photo of Gabriel Attal, one of the hopefuls in France's presidential election next year. – Photo courtesy of Ismail Aissoub/Wikimedia Commons

'Boost their profile'

Philippe Moreau-Chevrolet, a professor in communications at Sciences Po university, said the race was obviously on to replace President Emmanuel Macron, who steps down next year after serving the legal maximum of two consecutive terms.

"The presidential campaign kicked off with Bardella in *Paris Match*. Clearly, that was the starting whistle," he said.

"Then we had Gabriel Attal's turn, along the same lines."

Moreau-Chevrolet has said "revealing one's private life" was an essential part of any successful presidential bid.

High-profile politicians have long turned to the pages of *Paris Match*.

Former president Nicolas Sarkozy gave the magazine an interview in 2007 before he was elected.

François Hollande also graced the front cover with his then partner journalist Valérie Trierweiler before he was elected in 2012.

Macron and his wife Brigitte posed for *Paris Match* on a beach in 2016, before he took office the following year.

Political communications expert Gaspard Gantzer however argued it was not essential for candidates to share their private life.

"It's useful for those who need to boost their profile," he said.

"Ticking the 'private life' box sparks conversation among people who aren't necessarily interested in politics."

'Privacy is more important'

Other candidates who have declared they are vying for the Élysée Palace (the official residence of the French president) have not invited the French public into their personal lives.

Édouard Philippe, another former prime minister so far seen to have the best chance of beating the far right in the upcoming election, has shared details about his love of Bruce Springsteen and boxing.

He even opened up in 2023 about his struggle with alopecia hair loss and vitiligo, which changes skin colour.

But the 55-year-old mayor of the northern port city of Le Havre does not speak extensively about his family.

Gantzer said a candidate might choose to be different.

"If everyone is revealing their private life, you may have a card to play by deciding not to do so," he said.

"And you can build a message around that: 'My wife's and my children's privacy is more important than anything else.' That can also appeal to the French," he added. – AFP

Carney launches US\$18 billion Canada sovereign wealth fund

TORONTO – Prime Minister Mark Carney yesterday announced the creation of Canada's first-ever sovereign wealth fund, beginning with a C\$25 billion (US\$18.3) endowment he said will strengthen the economy amid a "crumbling" world order.

The fund will include both public and private investment and will aim to support major projects Carney says are crucial to reducing Canada's economic reliance on the United States over the coming decades.

"The US has changed. That's their right and we are responding. That is our imperative," the prime minister said in Ottawa.

In launching the fund, Carney referenced Norway – which like Canada has vast natural resources – but has for several decades used some of its energy revenue to build long-term national wealth and insulate the country from global economic shocks.

Carney said the Canada Strong Fund will direct capital to projects related to energy, critical minerals and infrastructure.

The fund marks his latest effort at deepening Canada's economic sovereignty as his government heads

into tense trade talks with President Donald Trump's administration.

The existing North American free trade agreement (NAFTA) – which has kept more than 85 percent of US-Canada trade tariff-free since Trump's return to office – is set to be revised this summer.

The United States has said it wants major changes and Trump's trade team has escalated its personal insults towards Carney, who has emerged as a leading figure in criticizing Trump's global leadership.

The deputy US Trade Representative, Rick Switzer, told the Council of Foreign Relations last week that Carney was acting "superior" and was letting his "ego" prevent him from acting in Canada's best interests.

"I would argue there's not a grown-up in Canada in charge there. You don't go out of your way to antagonise the leader of the country that you are absolutely existentially tied to. It's just political malpractice," Switzer said.

Carney said last week that some people were overstating Canada's reliance on the United States and that Washington does not get to dictate the terms of the upcoming trade negotiations. – AFP

UK's healthy life expectancy falls two years: study

LONDON – The number of years British people enjoy good health has fallen by over two years in a decade, with more suffering from ailments before hitting retirement age, a new study has shown.

"The UK's health is deteriorating and slipping further behind comparable nations," said the study's co-author Andrew Mooney, principal data analyst with the Health Foundation.

Between 2012-2014 and 2022-2024, healthy life expectancy (HLE) in the UK dropped from 62.9 years for men and 63.7 years for women to just under 61 for both.

The healthy life expectancy measures the average number of years a person would expect to live in good health based on current mortality rates and the levels of self-reported good health,

the Foundation said in its report released on Sunday.

It said the figures were "a key measure of the population's health" and provided "a more comprehensive picture of the UK's health than life expectancy alone".

The new findings were a "watershed moment" for the UK as the years of good health fell below the age of retirement, which is 66 and rising later in 2026 to 67, the study added.

"These findings reinforce growing evidence about declining health in the UK, particularly among the working-age population," the study said.

"Of 21 high-income countries, the UK is one of only five that saw healthy life expectancy fall between 2011 and 2021, and had the second steepest decline."

Mooney said "only the United

States now has a lower healthy life expectancy than the UK".

The report also warned of widening inequalities in healthy life expectancy between affluent and deprived areas.

The gap between the most and least deprived places in England "is now 19.4 years for males and 20.3 years for females".

In wealthy Richmond, a suburb of west London, healthy life expectancy for men is 69.3 years and for women 70.3.

But in the poorer northwestern seaside resort of Blackpool, it drops to 50.9 years for men.

"Successive governments have failed to take the long-term action needed to address this, resulting in a growing economic and fiscal impact as well as a substantial human cost," the report said. – AFP

Nations backing fossil fuel exit ‘a new power’: conference host Colombia

Anne-Sophie Thill

SANTA MARTA, Colombia – Around 60 nations are attending a world-first conference in Colombia to tackle an issue that has deadlocked the UN climate talks – how to exit the fossil fuels that cause global warming.

Colombia’s Environment Minister Irene Vélez Torres has been prominent as host of this breakaway climate conference, which has drawn nations wanting to accelerate the fossil fuel phaseout despite the stalemate in the UN-led “COP” summits.

These countries represent “a new power”, said Vélez Torres, a former mining and energy minister whose own country is navigating its exit from coal and oil.

Major fossil fuel producers are joining the first-of-its-kind talks but the biggest greenhouse gas emitters – including the United States, China and Russia – are skipping the event.

AFP interviewed Vélez Torres ahead of the high-level talks between ministers and climate envoys today and tomorrow in the Caribbean port town of Santa Marta:

QUESTION: The world’s biggest fossil fuel producers are not in Santa Marta. Does their absence threaten the credibility of this event?

ANSWER: “We can look at it the other way around. When the largest emitters have been present at the COP negotiations, they have been the ones who have pushed for a veto to prevent any discussion of the need to transition beyond fossil fuels.

Today, it is worth focusing on the more than 50 countries that are here, representing almost 50 percent of the global population, including



Colombia’s Environment Minister Irene Vélez speaks during an interview with AFP in Santa Marta, Colombia, on Sunday, on the sidelines of this week’s International Conference on the Just Transition Away from Fossil Fuels taking place today and tomorrow. – AFP

consumer countries, producer countries and vulnerable countries of the Global South and North.

In that sense, we are a new power today”.

Q: But wouldn’t their absence diminish the authority of any agreement reached in Santa Marta?

A: “Not at all, because we are not waiting for a joint declaration or new binding agreements between countries. We are waiting for solutions, and these do not necessarily depend on who the biggest emitters are. We hope that at some point they will get on board”.

Q: This conference is running parallel to – and outside – the UN climate talks. Does that indicate a growing frustration at the limitations of the annual COP summits?

A: “Multilateralism is in crisis, but this doesn’t mean we should do away with it.

“On the contrary, we need a multilateralism that is more deeply

rooted in the people and not just in governments, biases or economic lobbying. We need new alignments, new alliances”.

Q: Is it the end of the road for the COPs?

A: “The COPs have demonstrated a capacity for dialogue – but also limitations. One limitation relates to how the oil industry lobby has skewed the topics that can or cannot be included in the COPs.

“Another is the consensus methodology, which has resulted in a de facto veto against countries like Colombia that want more ambitious discussions on decisions particularly related to fossil fuels.

“And on the other hand, there is a methodological issue that has limited the inclusion of voices from civil society”.

Q: What concrete results will this conference produce?

A: “First, the launch of the first scientific panel dedicated to the energy transition. This panel will be able to advise cities, regions, countries and coalitions on developing ‘roadmaps’ for their own energy transition. We also expect a synthesis of the contributions from governments, civil society, the private sector, unions and the people who are here.

“This report will be submitted to the COP30 (presidency) and COP31 (presidency) as one input to the global roadmap for moving away from fossil fuels”.

Q: Colombia advocates for the clean energy transition but is a major producer of coal and oil. How does President Gustavo Petro’s government manage this paradox?

A: “We’ve said there will be no new hydrocarbon contracts or expansion of coal mining. With these decisions, we have simultaneously incentivised productive economies based on food production, tourism and industrialisation.

“The year 2025 showed, for the first time, that there were more exports in terms of remittances and foreign exchange from coffee versus coal. And 2025 was also the first year in which Colombia had more energy from non-conventional renewables, particularly solar, than from coal”.

– AFP

Technician dies installing stage for Shakira concert in Rio

RIO DE JANEIRO – A technician was killed on Sunday in Rio de Janeiro setting up a stage where pop superstar Shakira is set to perform a free concert later this week, authorities and organisers said.

Crews have been working for weeks to assemble a stage on the sands of the Brazilian city’s Copacabana beach, where crowds are expected from around the world to see the Colombian singer perform on May 2 as part of her record-breaking world tour.

The man suffered crushing injuries to his legs in a lifting system, the fire department said in a statement.

Workers managed to free the man and he was taken to hospital, but he did not survive, the state fire department said.

“Unfortunately, the technician passed away in hospital,” concert organiser Bonus Track said in a statement.

“Out of nowhere, we saw people running, and when we looked, the structure was on the ground,” António Marcos Ferreira dos Santos, 51, who was on the beach at the time, told AFP.

“People were saying that a man had gotten trapped underneath. People rushed over to pull him out.” – AFP

Catalan nationalist titan, 95, spared graft trial on health grounds

MADRID – Spain’s top criminal court yesterday removed Catalan nationalist figurehead Jordi Pujol from a corruption trial owing to the declining health of the 95-year-old, a titan of modern democratic Spanish politics.

The trial of Pujol and his seven children for alleged criminal association and money laundering centres on the origin of the fortune of the man who led Catalonia’s regional government from 1980 to 2003.

Pujol revealed in 2014 that his family kept undeclared money for more than 30 years in Andorra, a tiny state perched in the Pyrenees mountains between Spain and France.

He said the money was an inheritance from his father, a wealthy businessman, and denied it came from kickbacks for public contracts during his time in office.

After years of investigations, Pujol and his children were ordered to stand trial, with prosecutors seeking nine years in prison for the former Catalan leader.

But from the outset his frail health and cognitive decline put in doubt whether he would take part in the trial, which started in November.

Pujol’s lawyers said he was physically unable, but Madrid’s Audiencia Nacional (“National

Court”) first decided he would follow the proceedings by video link from his Barcelona home.

But the court withdrew Pujol from the trial yesterday after receiving new medical reports and holding a brief conversation with him before his scheduled declaration.

“It is impossible for Mr Jordi Pujol Soley to continue in this trial with full consciousness and abilities, therefore it is decided that from this moment... he is left out of the proceedings,” the court’s president said.

The trial continues for the children, who face jail terms of up to 29 years if convicted.

After the death of longtime ruler Generalissimo Francisco Franco in 1975, Pujol became one of democratic Spain’s most influential politicians as leader of Catalonia’s now defunct centre-right Convergence and Union alliance that supported minority governments in Madrid.

In exchange, Pujol won more powers for Catalonia in health, education and policing, earning him the nickname of “Spain’s viceroy”.

Despite championing Catalan nationalism for decades, which saw Franco’s regime jail him for two years, he always argued the wealthy northeastern region should remain a part of Spain. – AFP

Portuguese energy firm Galp’s profits soar due to Brazil boost

LISBON – Portuguese energy firm Galp Energia announced yesterday a 41 percent rise in adjusted first quarter net profit due to higher oil output in Brazil and robust crude prices.

Net profit soared to 272 million euros (US\$319 million) while oil and gas production rose 23 percent year-on-year to 129,000 barrels of oil equivalent a day after a sharp production hike at the Bacalhau oilfield off Brazil.

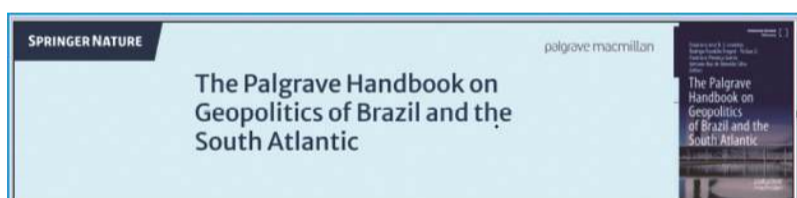
Refining margin shot up from US\$5.60 to US\$14.80 per barrel

of oil equivalent as margins on global markets rose significantly due to the Middle East war, the company said in a statement.

Adjusted EBITDA, a measure of a firm’s earnings from core operations before accounting for interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation, rose 41 percent year-on-year to 943 million euros.

At the end of March, Galp’s net debt stood at 1.35 billion euros, a rise of 10 percent over the past year.

– AFP



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

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

Reference (APA):

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

Link:

<https://link.springer.com/book/9789819511686>

'Nobody is better than us' says Luis Enrique as PSG prepare for Bayern



PARIS – Paris Saint-Germain coach Luis Enrique insisted yesterday that no team in Europe could claim to be better than his right now as the French giants prepare for their Champions League semi-final showdown against Bayern Munich.

"These are the two best teams in Europe, even if Arsenal have also had a great season," the Spanish coach told reporters on the eve of the semi-final first leg at the Parc des Princes.

"In terms of consistency, maybe Bayern are a little bit above us. But we have shown that no team is better than us."

PSG are in the semi-finals for a third straight season since Luis Enrique became coach in 2023 and are hoping to claim back-to-back Champions League titles after winning the trophy for the first time last season.

They have reached this stage by defeating Chelsea and Liverpool in the last two rounds.

"It is a real pleasure and it is deserved. You need to be ambitious to get to this stage and I think we are. We still want to go that bit further," Luis Enrique said.

PSG and Bayern have already met three times since the start of last season: the Germans won 1-0 at home in the league phase in November 2024 and the Parisians triumphed 2-0 in a Club World Cup quarter-final last July in the United States, but Bayern won 2-1 in Paris in the league phase in November.

There have been concerns in the PSG camp about the fitness of Vitinha after the Portuguese playmaker sat out his team's last two games due to injury.

However, he was back in training yesterday in a big boost to the defending champions.

"Everyone is ready," said the coach, who also saw Spanish midfielder Fabian Ruiz make his first start in three months after injury last weekend as PSG beat Angers 3-0 in Ligue 1.

The game will be played at 3 a.m. tomorrow morning Macau time.

– AFP/MPD

Football shorts

Modric suffers fractured cheekbone, will go under the knife: AC Milan



MILAN – Luka Modric fractured his cheekbone in a clash of heads during AC Milan's goalless draw with Juventus and will undergo surgery, his Serie A club said yesterday.

Croatia captain Modric went down in a challenge with Juve midfielder Manuel Locatelli and subsequently left the field with an ice pack to his face.

"Tests performed today [yesterday] revealed a fracture of his left cheekbone that will require surgery, scheduled for a few hours' time. Further details will be announced after the operation," said Milan in a statement.

Milan did not say for how long Modric, who signed a one-year deal with the seven-time European champions last summer, would be out of action.

The 40-year-old is also set to play at the upcoming World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico, assuming he recovers in time.

Milan are on course to return to the Champions League with four matches remaining in their Serie A season.

Massimiliano Allegri's team are third, six points ahead of fifth-placed Como, and face Sassuolo away this coming Sunday. – AFP

Mbappe doubt for Clasico after Real Madrid confirm thigh injury



MADRID – Real Madrid striker Kylian Mbappe is a doubt for the Clasico on May 10 after his club confirmed yesterday he has sustained a thigh injury.

"He has been diagnosed with an injury to the semitendinosus muscle in his left leg," said Los Blancos in a statement, after the France captain went off hurt during Madrid's 1-1 draw against Real Betis in La Liga last Friday.

Madrid, second in the Spanish top flight by 11 points from leaders Barcelona, face Espanyol on Sunday before taking on the Catalan giants the following weekend.

Real Madrid initially indicated Mbappe had suffered a muscular overload, but further tests showed their top goalscorer was injured.

If Madrid drop points against Espanyol without him and Barcelona defeat Osasuna on Saturday, Hansi Flick's side will be crowned champions for a second successive season.

Mbappe has been troubled by injury this season, generating concern in France with the World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico starting on June 11.

The 27-year-old, a world champion in 2018, was dogged by a knee issue which lasted for two months, the longest absence of his career, and admitted it caused him "frustration, anger and anxiety". – AFP

Team-first Kane propelling Bayern to glory as PSG showdown looms

Daniel Wighton



BERLIN – Having decisively ended his own silverware drought with back-to-back Bundesliga titles, Harry Kane's team-first approach has been key for a Bayern Munich side now chasing club football's biggest prize.

Whoever makes it through Bayern's Champions League semi-final against holders Paris Saint-Germain, with the first leg in the French capital today, will be the favourites for the final in Budapest in May.

Last season's Bundesliga title was Kane's maiden team trophy, at the age of 31. Having added another league crown this season, Bayern's habit of hoovering up trophies is already rubbing off on the England captain.

As always, Kane's individual statistics this year have been stunning. The former Tottenham forward has 53 goals in 45 games in all competitions, the most by an Englishman in any league in almost a century.

And this time around, Kane's goals have come at crucial moments of big games.

Against Real in Madrid, his long-range strike proved to be the winner.

In the second leg, Kane's first-half goal brought Bayern level on the night and put them ahead in a quarter-final tie which was in danger of getting away from them.

'I'm here to win the Champions League'

Kane left England 47 goals shy of Alan Shearer's Premier

League scoring record, with some commentators wondering why he would leave with the mark in sight.

But while Kane developed a reputation at Spurs for stacking up individual records rather than team honours, in hindsight the striker's pursuit of goals was a clear example of his team focus.

Since moving to Bayern, a club with quality across the pitch and a number of threats, Kane often drops to help in the build-up, sometimes deep into midfield.

Kane's willingness to sacrifice individual honours for team objectives has never been more evident than in recent weeks, when Bayern had the league largely wrapped up and needed to focus on Europe.

After Bayern beat Dortmund in February, Kane had scored four consecutive braces. With 30 goals in 24 games, he looked on course for Robert Lewandowski's single season record of 41 goals.

But since then, Kane has started just one of Bayern's seven league games, as Vincent Kompany has wrapped him in cotton wool for the big stage.

After coming off the bench to help Bayern come from three goals down to win 4-3 at Mainz on Saturday, Kane told reporters where his true focus lay.

"It'll be tough," Kane said of chasing down Lewandowski's record. "Obviously I'm here to try and win the Champions League and try and win the German Cup.

"So, ultimately that takes priority. All I can do is when I'm on the pitch,

try and score, try and impact the game."

Undoubtedly the biggest star in Bayern's dressing room, Kane could have pushed back against his benching, but he backed Kompany's call with loftier goals in mind.

"Something special"

Bayern were always expected to beat Mainz on Saturday but the way they overran their opponents in the second-half showed their unrelenting hunger and desire.

"This team is truly something special - that team spirit, that mentality - it is truly unique," sporting director Christoph Freund said afterwards.

"That gives us a tremendous amount of energy for Tuesday [today]."

Kane called PSG "the reigning European champions for a reason," adding the French champions are "a really strong side with some great quality and are well-coached.

"There's going to be a lot of activity. It's going to come down to moments and quality."

One challenge for Bayern is the absence of coach Vincent Kompany, who is suspended for the opening leg.

Kompany's English assistant Aaron Danks will be in the dugout. Kane said Bayern, who have lost just twice in all competitions this season, are well-drilled enough without the Belgian barking orders.

"Of course we'll miss him on the sideline. He's our boss and our leader. But everyone knows what needs to be done, even if the boss isn't on the sideline."

The game will be played at 3 a.m. tomorrow morning Macau time.

– AFP/MPD



Tottenham Hotspur's Dutch midfielder Xavi Simons is taken off on a stretcher during the English Premier League match against Wolverhampton Wanderers at the Molineux stadium in Wolverhampton, central England on Saturday.

Tottenham confirmed yesterday that "heartbroken" Xavi Simons had ruptured an anterior cruciate ligament, forcing him out of the club's relegation scrap and the World Cup.

In an emotional post on social media late Sunday, Simons said his season was over.

"They say life can be cruel and today it feels that way," Simons, who has played 34 times for his country, wrote on Instagram.

"My season has come to an abrupt end and I'm just trying to process it. Honestly, I'm heartbroken. None of it makes sense.

"All I've wanted to do is fight for my team and now the ability to do that has been snatched away from me, along with the World Cup. Representing my country this summer, just gone."

– AFP

Sabalenka downs Osaka to reach Madrid Open quarters

Tennis

MADRID - World number one Aryna Sabalenka overcame Naomi Osaka 6-7 (1/7), 6-3, 6-2 in a gripping battle yesterday to reach the Madrid Open quarter-finals.

Sabalenka, who has claimed titles at Miami, Indian Wells and Brisbane this year, was tested by her Japanese opponent in the fourth-round clash but came back from a set and a break down to triumph.

"I was just trying to take one ball at a time and my team was there for me, they really (pushed) me to keep fighting, and I'm really happy that I didn't give up and I was pushing until the very last point," said Sabalenka.

The first set between the two four-time Grand Slam winners was tight, with only one break point forced, by Sabalenka, which Osaka saved to hold for 2-1.

Osaka dominated in the tie-break, ripping into a 5-0 lead and then triumphing when Sabalenka

lashed a return wide.

Sabalenka stepped up a gear in the second frame, although world number 15 Osaka dug deep to survive three break points and then managed to engineer a break for herself to take a 2-1 lead.

However, the Belarusian immediately broke to love and then again in the eighth game, serving out to take the second set.

Only Elena Rybakina has beaten Sabalenka this year, in the Australian Open final, and the 27-year-old dominated in the third set, securing breaks in the fifth and seventh games while Osaka could not put pressure on her opponent's serve.

Sabalenka sealed her victory serving to love with an ace to reach the last eight, where she will face American Hailey Baptiste.

"She's an incredible player, we had a really tight match in Miami, and especially here in Madrid I think this surface suits her game," added Sabalenka.

Casper Ruud eased to a 6-3, 6-1 win over Alejandro Davidovich Fokina to reach the last 16, while Stefanos Tsitsipas defeated Daniel Merida 6-4, 6-2. - AFP



Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka returns the ball to Japan's Naomi Osaka during their 2026 WTA Tour Madrid Open tennis tournament singles match at the Caja Magica in Madrid, yesterday. - AFP

2026海南·三亚 第六届亚洲沙滩运动会 SANYA HAINAN 2026 5th Asian Beach Games					
MEDAL TABLE					
Rank	NOC				Total
1	China	14	11	5	30
2	Thailand	7	5	3	15
3	Philippines	3	2	2	7
4	Viet Nam	2	3	4	9
5	United Arab Emirates	2	2	2	6
6	Islamic Republic of Iran	2	0	0	2
7	Republic of Korea	1	3	3	7
8	Kazakhstan	1	1	3	5
9	India	1	1	0	2
10	Uzbekistan	1	0	0	1
11	Sri Lanka	0	2	4	6
12	Democratic People's Republic of Korea	0	2	0	2
13	Chinese Taipei	0	1	4	5
14	Cambodia	0	1	1	2
14	Hong Kong, China	0	1	1	2

Sport in brief



Asian Games years could be moved in shake-up: reports

HONG KONG - The Asian Games could be moved to odd-numbered years starting in 2031 so the event takes place in the 12 months leading into the Olympics, reports say, reshaping the sporting calendar.

The reported proposal would mean Asia's biggest sporting spectacle doubling up as qualifying and preparation for the Olympics, giving it added significance.

The Asian Games in Japan this September-October will be unchanged but the 2030 edition in Doha would be pushed back a year, after which the Games will be held every four years as normal but in odd years instead of even ones.

The executive board of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) has approved the idea and there will now be more talks with international sports federations, China's state Xinhua news agency said.

Specialist website Inside The Games said the proposal was discussed by the OCA in Sanya, the Chinese resort city currently hosting the Asian Beach Games.

Song Luzeng, vice president of the OCA, told Xinhua: "It would allow the Asian Games to serve as a qualifying event for the Olympics, giving more elite athletes valuable competition opportunities and raising the overall standard of the Games."

The OCA did not immediately reply to an AFP request for comment.

The Asian Games is the continent's biggest sporting event and typically involves more competitors than the Olympics. - AFP

Cebu to host 7th Asian Beach Games in 2028

SANYA - Cebu City in the Philippines will host the 2028 Asian Beach Games, the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) confirmed yesterday.

OCA President Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad Al Thani and Philippine Olympic Committee President Abraham Tolentino attended a ceremony in Sanya to sign the host city agreement.

Sheikh Joaan thanked the Philippine government and the city of Cebu, and expressed hope for a smooth flag handover at the closing ceremony of the ongoing Sanya Games.

Tolentino invited OCA members to Cebu, saying he looked forward to welcoming them after the Sanya Games.

He noted that the Philippines last hosted a continental multi-sport event at the 1954 Asian Games in Manila, and said the country is looking forward to staging the Beach Games.

Tolentino added that the Philippines aims to showcase its hospitality and goodwill as host, while highlighting the appeal of Cebu City.

- Xinhua
Photo on page 16

China dominates open water swimming with 3 golds at Asian Beach Games

SANYA - After securing another title in the open water swimming mixed 4x1.5km relay yesterday morning, China dominated the discipline by sweeping all three golds.

The relay crew of Zhang Ziyang, Li Xinxuan, Chen Yijing and Liu Peixin captured the gold medal with a time of 1 hour 5 minutes and 26.8 seconds, finishing 1 minute and 5 seconds ahead of silver medalists Vietnam and South Korea.

"The coach had confidence in my ability to compete against male swimmers in the first leg," said Li, who had claimed the women's 5km gold two days previously. Among all seven teams, Li was the only female starter. "I did not face intense pressure from opponents today, and I was surprised to keep pace with the male competitors. I maintained a solid racing line and

stayed close to the leading pack throughout my leg," Li continued.

"Starting with a female swimmer was our unique team tactic, which differed from other teams' strategies, and it paid off perfectly," said Zhang, who swam China's final leg.

Following the mixed relay gold, Zhang and Li have now secured two gold medals apiece at the Games, and led China to conclude their open water swimming campaign with three golds and one silver.

Elsewhere along the coastline, Chinese athletes maintained their dominance in the board classes of the sailing competitions, with multiple athletes leading their respective overall standings.

Yan Guoguo won the ILCA 4 girls Race 09, while Cheng Wenyu finished second in the

Optimist girls race but retained her overall lead. In Formula Kite, Xue Shiming claimed the men's Race 13 victory, and Li Shuxuan and Ma Zilin secured a one-two finish in the women's event to hold the top two overall spots. Wang Yiguo and Chen Yimin won their respective foil windsurfing races to extend their overall leads. Medals in all eight sailing disciplines will be decided today.

In other events, the beach handball group stage concluded with China's men's team being eliminated from the tournament after losing 2-0 to Iran.

In 3x3 basketball, China's men's team cruised to a 21-9 victory over Macao in their final group game. Despite finishing third in Group A with a 2-1 record, they advanced to the playoffs. - Xinhua

Photos on page 16

Joshua signs deal to face Fury in all-British grudge match

Boxing

LONDON - Former heavy-weight champions Anthony Joshua and Tyson Fury are finally set to lock horns later this year in a long-awaited all-British grudge match.

Joshua will make his ring return following a car crash that killed two close friends against Albania's Kristian Prenga in Saudi Arabia in July.

The 36-year-old's promoter, Eddie Hearn, said that a deal to then fight Fury had been agreed after years of speculation and false starts.

"Signed, sealed, delivered! AJ v Fury is on!" Hearn said on Instagram.

"The biggest piece of business we've ever done but more importantly the one we've always wanted. Biggest year of AJ's career

coming up, the comeback is on."

No date or venue has been announced but the bout is expected to take place in November and be shown on Netflix.

Joshua escaped relatively unscathed after a collision that killed Sina Ghami and Latif Ayodele in Nigeria in December, shortly after his most recent fight, a sixth-round knockout of YouTube star Jake Paul.

"It's no secret I've taken some time to consolidate and rebuild to be ready for stepping back into the ring and this is the next step on that journey," Joshua said, referring to the bout against Prenga in Riyadh on July 25.

Prenga has 20 wins - all by knockout - in his 21 fights as a professional, but has yet to face an

opponent anywhere near the class of the 2012 Olympic champion.

Joshua, a former Olympic champion, and Fury are both two-time world champions.

Fury, 37, made his comeback after a 16-month retirement two weeks ago with a unanimous points victory over Russia's Arslanbek Makhmudov.

Both Joshua and Fury have lost twice to the current king of the heavyweight division, Ukrainian Oleksandr Usyk.

Joshua has a record of 29 wins, including 26 by knock-out, and four defeats, including two KOs, in his 33 fights.

Fury's record is 35 wins, including 24 KOs, one draw and two defeats in 38 bouts. - AFP

Michael Jackson biopic debuts atop N American box office

LOS ANGELES – “Michael,” the much-anticipated biopic about late superstar Michael Jackson, debuted atop the North American box office this past weekend with a thriller-ing US\$97 million, industry estimates showed Sunday.

The film, directed by Antoine Fuqua and distributed by Lionsgate, chronicles the legendary artist’s rise from a child star to one of the world’s most famous pop icons.

In the starring role is Jaafar Jackson, the popstar’s nephew.

“This is a record-shattering opening for a musical biography,” said analyst David A. Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research.

The film has strong audience approval, “playing as a feel good, nostalgic appreciation,” he said, but “reviews are weak.”

“Most critics feel the film is superficial and avoids the complicated parts of the performer’s life, including allegations of sexual misbehaviour,” Gross said, while noting a Part 2 is in the works.

With the film already released in Europe, it has globally taken in nearly US\$220 million, according to Exhibitor Relations.

In second place at the US and Canadian box office was “The Super Mario Galaxy Movie,” with another US\$21.2 million.

After spending the last three weeks in the top spot, the animated sequel from Universal and Illumination Studios has hauled in over US\$775 million at the global box office, Exhibitor Relations reported.

Third place went to Amazon MGM’s hit sci-fi adventure comedy “Project Hail Mary,” with US\$13.2 million.

The film, which stars Ryan Gosling as a teacher-turned-astronaut who must save Earth from a dimming sun, has earned nearly US\$600 million worldwide,

in an extended theatrical run.

In fourth place with US\$5.6 million was “Lee Cronin’s The Mummy,” an original horror flick from Warner Bros about a young girl possessed by a demon in an ancient mummification ritual.

Fifth place went to “The Drama,” A24’s romantic comedy with a dark twist starring Zendaya and Robert Pattinson about a couple unravelling just before their wedding.

The film took in an additional US\$2.6 million, for a global box office haul of US\$80 million.

– AFP



Juliano Valdi attends Lionsgate’s “Michael” Los Angeles premiere after-party at Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel last Monday in Los Angeles, California. Valdi plays the young Michael in the film.

– AFP

From Adele to Raye, the UK school nurturing future stars

Caroline Taix

LONDON – If there was a recipe for success in the entertainment industry, The BRIT School* in London should maybe get a standing ovation for hitting all the right notes.

Singers Amy Winehouse, Adele and Raye, as well as actor Tom Holland – better known as Spiderman – are among the alumni of the state-funded school, which prides itself on being free.

2026 started strong, with former pupils Olivia Dean and Lola Young both honoured at the Grammy Awards in Los Angeles.

Dean was named best new artist of the year, while Young won Best Pop Solo Performance with her soaraway hit “Messy”.

Both artists also triumphed at the Brit Awards, the UK’s flagship music ceremony.

“It’s incredibly humbling,” said Chris McInnes, their former teacher and deputy head of music at the BRIT School, which specialises in performing and creative arts.

“We would never take credit for any of their success ... we want to make the best place for those students who are going to be that successful,” he told AFP.

About 1,500 students, aged between 14 and 19, attend the BRIT School, where they study for and sit the regular UK curriculum exams, including GCSEs and A-levels.

Teenagers arrive for their day smiling, greeting teachers and the headmaster as they make their way through the corridors.

Some sing snatches of songs. Others work quietly in recording studios.

Behind one door, a group was rehearsing a number from the musical “Six”.

Cultural diversity

Keyboardist Luke Crown, 18, and singer Naomi Simon, 19, were practising for a May concert.



September 27, 2024 photo of the BRIT School for Performing Arts and Technology in Croydon, London – Photo courtesy of Takoizu/Wikimedia Commons

“It’s a very unique place. There’s nowhere else that really you can study popular music to this intensity,” said Crown.

Naomi Simon has already had “a really big opportunity” thanks to the school – singing in the choir that backed chart-topper Raye on her latest album.

None of it would have been possible if the school charged fees, she said.

“My family doesn’t come from a place which has lots of money ... so to come to a place where finances isn’t [sic] an issue for me is amazing,” she said.

The school is funded about 80 percent by the state. The rest comes from supporters, including companies, said headmaster Stuart Worden.

“The world needs diverse voices ... and so, every background should be able to talk about how they feel about the world using the arts,” he added.

“Why should only people who can afford ballet lessons and ballet shoes be our dancers?”

Worden has worked at the school for 32 years, after it opened in the early 1990s in a low-income part of Croydon, a culturally diverse south London district.

In the reception, photos of former pupils are displayed: one is a stunt coordinator for movies, another a lighting technician at Eurovision.

‘Be nice’

McInnes recently organised a reunion for former students who left the school a decade ago.

“Whether they were making huge amounts of money or whether they were household names ... 10 years after they left they were still

working in the industry,” he said.

Artists such as Adele, Raye and Dean regularly speak about the BRIT School. Raye still tests new songs with Worden.

“I had the time of my life there. It’s not a stage-stage school, but of course there’s [sic] kids doing pirouettes and going ‘Aaaaaahhhhh!’ in the hallways,” Adele told BBC 4 radio in 2022.

“It was such a melting pot of every single type of teenager ... It was absolute heaven.”

During lockdown in 2020, “Tom Holland was one of the first students online giving actor classes from his bedroom,” Worden recalled.

One piece of advice McInnes gives his students is simple: “Be nice to each other.”

“There’s [sic] so many people with amazing talent, but if you’re not an easy person to work with, if you’re not reliable, if you’re not kind and empathetic, no one is going to want to work with you.”

The pupils are also encouraged to step outside their comfort zones. Even if it is their passion, they cannot spend two years just writing R&B songs or playing heavy metal.

Teachers still remember Adele performing on stage at the end-of-year show.

“I remember everybody came out of that show going, right, that was something else that we just saw there,” said McInnes. – AFP, MPD

*The formal name is BRIT School for Performing Arts and Technology; BRIT is an acronym for the British Record Industry Trust, which founded and partially funds the school.

Son of director Rob Reiner pays tribute to slain parents

NEW YORK – Slain Hollywood director Rob Reiner’s son Jake paid an emotional tribute on Friday to his parents, allegedly slain by his brother Nick, calling it “almost too impossible to process.”

“We lost more than half of our family that night in the most violent way imaginable,” Nick Reiner wrote in his first detailed public remarks about the gruesome killings.

His brother Nick faces two counts of first-degree murder over the double killing that sent shockwaves through Hollywood days before Christmas.

“Any loss of a parent is devastating, but nothing compares to losing both of them at the same time and, on top of that, having your brother be at the center of

it,” Jake wrote in a Substack post titled “Mom and Dad.”

Nick Reiner was arrested on December 14 after the bodies of his filmmaker father and his mother, photographer Michele Singer Reiner, were discovered at their home in the upmarket Brentwood neighbourhood of Los Angeles.

Prosecutors said 79-year-old Rob Reiner – who helmed huge hits including “When Harry Met Sally” and “A Few Good Men” – and his wife, 70, were stabbed to death.

Nick Reiner, who remains in jail and has not been granted bail, was ordered to return to court tomorrow.

If convicted as charged, Nick Reiner could face life in prison without parole, or the death penalty, although California does not routinely carry out capital

punishment.

Nick Reiner, who lived in a guest house on his parents’ property, had attended a party at the home of comedian Conan O’Brien on December 13 with his parents, where some attendees reportedly said he had behaved erratically.

Rob Reiner, the son of legendary comedian Carl Reiner, started his showbiz career in acting.

He won fame as the oafish son-in-law Michael “Meathead” Stivic on groundbreaking 1970s sitcom “All in the Family,” before transitioning to directing.

As a director, his output included classic films like 1984’s rock music mockumentary “This is Spinal Tap,” fantasy gem “The Princess Bride” from 1987, and seminal coming-of-age movie “Stand By Me.” – AFP

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 10°C~21°C	Manila 24°C~35°C	New York 10°C~19°C	Lisbon 14°C~25°C
Shanghai 12°C~19°C	Bangkok 27°C~36°C	London 7°C~16°C	Rio de Janeiro 21°C~28°C
Hong Kong 23°C~27°C	Tokyo 15°C~23°C	Frankfurt 7°C~22°C	Luanda 24°C~29°C
Taipei 20°C~31°C	Singapore 25°C~34°C	Vancouver 7°C~13°C	Maputo 19°C~25°C
Guangzhou 21°C~27°C	Kuala Lumpur 25°C~36°C	Paris 11°C~22°C	Dili 24°C~31°C
Nanjing 10°C~17°C	Jakarta 24°C~33°C	Moscow 1°C~3°C	São Tomé 26°C~31°C
Guilin 16°C~24°C	Seoul 8°C~18°C	Las Vegas 15°C~25°C	Praia 18°C~26°C
Xi’an 11°C~23°C	Sydney 12°C~23°C	Monte Carlo 13°C~19°C	Bissau 19°C~36°C

- 1. Wang Yiguo of China competes during the foil windsurfing boys' race at the 6th Asian Beach Games in Sanya, Hainan Province, yesterday. – Xinhua
- 2. Zeng Pucheng (left) of Macao vies against Yan Peng of mainland China during the 3x3 basketball men's group A match between mainland China and Macao at the 6th Asian Beach Games in Sanya, Hainan Province, yesterday. – Xinhua
- 3. Jirati Chanliang (front)/Sorrasak Thaosiri of Thailand compete during the teqball men's doubles final against Jalil Ali/Abdulrahman Ahmed Radhi of Iraq at the 6th Asian Beach Games in Sanya, Hainan Province, yesterday. – Xinhua
- 4. Cyril Derla Dacudao of the Philippines competes during the formula kite women's race at 6th Asian Beach Games in Sanya, Hainan Province, yesterday. – Xinhua
- 5. Nikita (third right) of team India competes during the Beach Kabaddi Women's Final Match against Sri Lanka at the 6th Asian Beach Games in Sanya, Hainan Province, yesterday. – Xinhua
- 6. Participants pose for a group photo after the host city contract signing ceremony for the 7th Asian Beach Games in Sanya, Hainan Province, yesterday. The 7th Asian Beach Games will be held in Cebu of the Philippines in 2028. – Xinhua

