

# Govt extends coverage in disaster insurance scheme

Tony Wong

The government announced yesterday that this year's edition of its annual insurance scheme for financial losses suffered by local small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) caused by natural disasters has introduced one new coverage, according to which an insured company can claim a payout equivalent to 10 percent of their policy's insured sum after a No.10 typhoon signal is hoisted for at least 10 hours, even though they have not incurred any financial losses.

As previously, this year's insurance scheme will be run with a subsidy provided for eligible companies to pay part of the annual premium of their policy.

The insurance scheme is run and overseen by the Macau Monetary Authority (AMCM), while the subsidy scheme is operated by the Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSED) through its Industrial and Commercial Development Fund (FDIC).

The two government entities announced this year's insurance scheme and its respective subsidy scheme during a press conference at the DSED headquarters in Nam Van yesterday.

The government launched the annual insurance scheme and its corresponding subsidy scheme in 2019. The government has been running the insurance scheme, officially known as Small- and Medium-sized Enterprises Major Disaster Property Insurance, in collaboration with a number of insurance companies.



Doris Chan Kuan I (centre), a member of the Macau Monetary Authority's (AMCM) board of directors, speaks during yesterday's press conference as Lau Kit Lon (left), who heads the Economic and Technological Development Bureau's (DSED) Economic Activities Development Department, and Hong Kai Man, an executive of China Taiping Insurance (Macau) Company Limited, look on. – Photo: Tony Wong

Since its launch in 2019, the government has enacted various amendments to the modus operandi of the insurance scheme, such as extending the scope of disasters covered by the insurance, and lowering the annual premiums.

For this year's insurance and subsidy schemes, according to yesterday's press conference, eligible SMEs can submit their applications from now until December 31.

As previously, this year's insurance scheme covers losses resulting from damage during the hoisting of a No.8 or higher (Nos. 9 or 10) typhoon signal, a Red storm surge warning signal or above, or a Black rainstorm warning signal.

A Red storm surge warning signal means that the flood level is forecast to reach between 1.5 metres and 2.5 metres above the road surface in the Inner Harbour area. Macau's highest storm surge warning is the Black warning – when the flooding is expected to exceed 2.5 metres.

The Black rainstorm warning signal, the highest one, means that "heavy rain has fallen or is expected to fall over extensive areas, exceeding 80 millimetres in an hour, and is likely to continue".

The hoisting of a No.8 or higher typhoon signal and the hoisting of a Red storm surge warning signal or higher have been covered by the insurance scheme since its launch in 2019,

while the hoisting of a Black rainstorm warning signal was added to the scheme in 2022.

As in previous years, the insurance scheme and the subsidy scheme this year cover companies employing up to 100 employees.

As in previous years, this year's insurance scheme comprises four plans for eligible companies to choose from, namely covering losses of 100,000 patacas, 200,000 patacas, 300,000 patacas, and 500,000 patacas. The annual premiums of the four plans will be 15 percent of their respective covered amounts – 15,000 patacas, 30,000 patacas, 45,000 patacas, and 75,000 patacas.

Continued on p.6

## Lula may meet Trump in Washington tomorrow: source



BRASÍLIA – Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva may meet with his US counterpart Donald Trump in Washington tomorrow, a source in the Brazilian presidency told AFP.

The two leaders, who have a history of rocky relations, have met only once before, in Malaysia last year.

A second meeting planned in Washington earlier this year did not take place.

"The president's meeting with Trump for Thursday [tomorrow] is well underway. It is a possibility, it is not confirmed. But it is on track," a source within the presidency told AFP yesterday.

The planned encounter has been widely

reported in Brazilian media.

The White House did not immediately respond to AFP's requests for confirmation of the meeting.

Lula, 80, and Trump, 79, stand on polar opposite sides on issues such as multilateralism, international trade and the fight against climate change.

Relations had thawed after the Malaysia meeting between the leaders, which led to the lifting of punitive tariffs imposed by Washington on Brazil.

But Lula has been outspoken against Trump's government, from its ouster of former president Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela to the war in Iran. – AFP

## Boy, 12, arrested in HK over homemade bomb

HONG KONG – A 12-year-old Form One Hong Kong student was arrested yesterday on suspicion of attempting to make explosives, police said yesterday.

Officers said they were alerted a day earlier to a video shared on social media purportedly showing someone manufacturing explosives in an experiment outdoors.

The boy was apprehended in Tseung Kwan O the same day and has since been detained for investigation.

There were no injuries or damage. Officers from the explosive ordnance

disposal bureau seized chemical substances suspected to be explosive residue.

"While the experiment was conducted under a bridge, the site was right next to a public rest area and a jogging trail," acting chief inspector Choi Ting-kwong said.

"He ignored his own safety and that of others by carrying out the experiment involving explosives in a public space."

Choi reminded the public that manufacturing explosives is a serious offence.

In Hong Kong, the minimum age of criminal responsibility is 10 years old.

– RTHK, MPD

### Hunan orders full fireworks production suspension after fatal blast

All fireworks enterprises in Hunan Province have been required to suspend production immediately for a full safety overhaul to eliminate potential safety risks, the provincial emergency management department said yesterday.

– Story on p. 7

### Trump urges Iran to 'do the smart thing'

US President Donald Trump urged Iran yesterday to "do the smart thing" and make a deal to end the war, saying even as a ceasefire teetered that he did not want to kill more Iranians.

– Story on p. 10

### Portugal arrests 15 police officers in rape, torture probe

Another 15 officers suspected of torturing and abusing vulnerable people were arrested in Portugal yesterday, in a widening investigation into abuses of police power in the Iberian country.

– Story on p. 11

# Non-resident in ICU for severe influenza A: SSM

**Khalel Vallo**

The Health Bureau (SSM) confirmed in a statement yesterday a severe case of influenza afflicting a 57-year-old non-resident who was in serious condition.

According to the statement, the patient has a history of chronic illness and developed symptoms including fever and cough last Thursday. He travelled alone from China's Taiwan region to Macau last Friday and self-medicated during his stay without seeking medical attention.

On Monday, as his condition

worsened, he sought treatment at the Macau Medical Centre of the Peking Union Medical College Hospital (PUMCH) emergency department, where he was diagnosed with influenza A accompanied by bilateral pneumonia, the statement said, adding that his condition further deteriorated and he was transferred to the intensive care unit (ICU) for treatment later that day.

The patient was in serious condition, with the bureau continuing to monitor the case, the bureau said in yesterday's statement. ■

# 'Smart Immigration Clearance' to be extended to Hengqin Port's joint-service lanes from tomorrow

**Khalel Vallo**

The local Public Security Police (PSP) announced yesterday that "Smart Immigration Clearance" will launch tomorrow at the Hengqin Port checkpoint's one-stop, joint-service lanes. The upgrade will allow eligible drivers to pass through the border without presenting physical documents.

The statement said that the measure is jointly implemented by Macau's Public Security Police and Public Security Forces Affairs Bureau (DFSFM) in conjunction with the Zhuhai General Station of Exit and Entry Frontier Inspection and the Economic Development Bureau of the Guangdong-Macau In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, aiming to enhance clearance efficiency and deepen Macau-Hengqin integration.

The system was first introduced in November last year at the checkpoint's automated passenger channels, the statement noted, adding that the service has operated steadily, with over 280,000 registered users and more than 4.66 million crossings recorded, accounting for about 35 percent of total automated channel usage.

With the latest upgrade, the service will be extended to the one-stop joint-service lanes, enabling drivers to complete clearance through fingerprint and facial recognition verification without presenting identity documents, the statement said, underlining that the system covers four categories of users – local residents, Hong Kong permanent residents, Chinese mainland residents and China's



This poster provided by the Public Security Police (PSP) yesterday shows the 'Smart Immigration Clearance' which will be extended to the one-stop, joint-service lanes at Hengqin Port checkpoint from tomorrow.

Taiwan region residents, subject to relevant permit and registration requirements.

Drivers must complete a one-time registration at the checkpoint by verifying biometric data and agreeing to the measure, the statement noted, adding that prior registration for other automated clearance channels does not apply to this service.

While the upgraded lanes support document-free clearance, the card scanning function remains available,

the statement added, pointing out that drivers are still required to carry valid identification documents for inspection when necessary.

The statement concluded that additional personnel will be deployed during the initial phase to assist users, while system performance will be closely monitored to ensure smooth operation and further support cross-border travel between Macau and Hengqin. ■

# Police arrest mainlander for stealing motorbike

**Armindo Neves**

The Public Security Police (PSP) arrested a man from the Chinese mainland for stealing a motorcycle on Labour Day, PSP spokesman Wong Wai Chong said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Wong identified the suspect as a sewing worker in his fifties, surnamed Ren.

According to Wong, a motorcycle owner parked his vehicle on Avenida do Aeroporto (機場大馬路) at around 7 p.m. on April 30. When he returned to retrieve the motorbike at around 11 p.m. he discovered that he didn't have his keys so he was unable to drive home, Wong said.

When he returned to the area at 5 p.m. on May 1, he found that the vehicle had vanished, Wong said, adding that he then reported the theft to the police at around 10 p.m. that day.

Wong said that based on CCTV footage, PSP officers identified Ren as the suspected thief.

According to Wong, at around 12:30 a.m. on May 1, Ren was seen walking near Avenida do Aeroporto before driving away on the stolen motorbike.

During the ride, CCTV camera footage showed him running a red light. At around 4 p.m. on May 2, Ren was stopped by police for riding the motorbike against oncoming traffic on Avenida Olimpica (奧林匹克大馬路) in Taipa, Wong said.

Under questioning, Ren denied stealing the motorcycle,

claiming that the vehicle had been lent to him by a relative in the mainland. Meanwhile, the owner told officers that no helmet had been stored in his motorcycle, leading the police to suspect that Ren's helmet may also have been stolen, Wong said, adding that the owner discovered some damage to the body of the motorcycle.

Ren has meanwhile been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing charges of theft and causing property damage, Wong said.

Meanwhile, Wong also said that Ren violated the Road Traffic Law by running a red light, driving without a licence, driving against the oncoming traffic, and riding without a helmet. ■



This undated handout photo provided by the Public Security Police (PSP) yesterday shows a PSP officer escorting the motorcycle theft suspect surnamed Ren to a police station.

# Police nab mainland woman for stealing 60 items worth 3,000 patacas

**Armindo Neves**

The Public Security Police (PSP) nabbed a woman from the Chinese mainland for stealing 60 items worth 3,000 patacas from four local shops on Sunday, PSP spokesman Wong Wai Chon said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Wong identified the suspect as a jobless woman in her twenties, surnamed Wu.

According to Wong, at around 4:30 p.m. that day, the Public Security Police received a report from the owner of a stationery shop on Rua de Tai Lin in Taipa, saying that while taking inventory, they discovered that several items had been stolen. The loss amounted to 11 items with a total value of around 270 patacas, Wong said.

Based on the store's surveillance footage and the city's CCTV footage, according to Wong, PSP officers identified Wu as the suspected shoplifter and tracked her whereabouts, intercepting her in a

hotel lobby in Taipa at around 6 p.m. on Sunday.

Wu admitted to the theft, Wong said, adding that during a search of her hotel guestroom, police seized 60 items. After sorting and identifying the goods, it was confirmed that they had been stolen from four shops in the city, including the stationers on Rua de

Tai Lin, Wong said, adding that the total value of the stolen goods amounted to around 3,000 patacas.

Additionally, Wong pointed out, the suspect's loot included eight items that could not be traced to any shop.

Wu has meanwhile been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing a theft charge. ■



This pixelated undated photo provided by the Public Security Police (PSP) yesterday shows evidence seized from the theft suspect's hotel guestroom in Taipa on Sunday.

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### Macau Weather

**CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY INTERVALS. ONE OR TWO SHOWERS AT FIRST. FORCE 3 TO 5 EAST TO SOUTHEASTERLY WINDS. RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 70% AND 95%.**



21°C~26°C

Source: SMG

# 42<sup>nd</sup> issue of 'Books and the City' now available

Rui Pastorin

The 42<sup>nd</sup> issue of the Cultural Affairs Bureau's "Books and the City" newsletter has been published, offering new highlights for readers to explore across its different sections.

With 3,000 free physical copies available, along with a digital version, this edition is themed "Macao Just Read" and coincides with the recent Regulation to Promote Public Reading introduced in February this year, as noted in the newsletter's introduction.

Among this issue's highlights are delving into the reading promotion efforts of IC's Public Library, including the "Ten-minute Read" campaign. The statement said that it also garners insights from a "seasoned reading advocate", a local bookshop representatives, and an academic library representative, all giving their thoughts on the state of Macao's reading promotion as well as inviting readers to explore local reading venues, according to the newsletter.

Other highlights are a review of the "Macao Reading Festival 2025" in the "Library Handbook" section; the "Author's Say"

section spotlighting the trilingual "Macao's Historical Witness" co-authored by husband and wife Christopher Chu and Maggie Hoi Pui Man; and the "New Launchings" section, which features 10 trilingual (Chinese, Portuguese and English) book reviews, along with book and magazine recommendations, according to the statement.

For more details, along with the e-version, one can visit [www.library.gov.mo](http://www.library.gov.mo).



This poster provided by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) shows the front cover of the 42<sup>nd</sup> issue of its "Books and the City" newsletter.

# '2026 Singapore Int'l Violin Competition' winner to perform with Macao Orchestra



This poster released by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) recently promotes its upcoming "Singapore International Violin Competition Winner's Concert" to be held at the Cathedral of the Nativity of Our Lady (Sé Catedral) in the city centre this Saturday.

Khalel Vallo

The winner of the "2026 Singapore International Violin Competition" will perform with the Macao Orchestra at the Cathedral of the Nativity of Our Lady (Sé Catedral) in the city centre this Saturday, according to a recent statement by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC).

The "Singapore International Violin Competition Winner's Concert" will start at 8 p.m. as part of the Macao Orchestra's 2025-26 Concert Season, the statement said, featuring Ukrainian violinist Georgii Moroz, who won first prize at the latest edition of the Singapore International Violin Competition.

Organised by the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music at the National University of Singapore, the competition is a triennial event

in the Asia-Pacific region aimed at supporting young violinists, according to the statement.

Moroz's performance was praised as a "soulful dialogue", with judges highlighting his technical ability and emotional expression, the statement noted, adding that the programme will include works by Denmark's Carl Nielsen (1865-1931), Germany's Max Bruch (1838-1920) and Austria's Franz Schubert (1797-1828), featuring "Maskerade Overture", "Violin Concerto No.1 in G minor" and "Symphony No. 4 in C minor, 'Tragic'".

The concert will last around 1 hour and 15 minutes with no interval, and tickets are priced at 150 patacas. For ticketing and enquiries, please call the 24-hour hotline on 2855 5555 or visit [www.macauticket.com](http://www.macauticket.com).

# 'Letras & Companhia' features extensive programme till May 24

Rui Pastorin

A raft of programmes is set for this year's over two-week-long Letras & Companhia ("Literature and Companions"), with the event having started yesterday and lasting through May 24.

The literary and cultural festival for parents and children, title-sponsored by integrated resort operator Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG) and this year themed "My City", is organised by IPOR - Instituto Português do Oriente in conjunction with the Consulate-General of Portugal in Macau and Hong Kong.

While the event will formally open on Saturday, the event's children's book fair "Alphabet Market" is already taking place at Livraria Portuguesa (Portuguese Bookshop) on Rua de São Domingos (板樟堂街). This ongoing free-admission portion of the event features a selection of children's literature and works from the young adult genre throughout the festival. Authors comprise those from Portuguese-speaking countries (PSCs), Macau and elsewhere in China, according to information from the organisers, noting that the literary works are in Portuguese, Chinese, and English.

Held across venues such as IPOR and the Portuguese Bookshop, other programmes set to be held include book launches and presentations,



Photo of a selection of books featured for the children's book fair "Alphabet Market" at Livraria Portuguesa taken yesterday by Rui Pastorin

workshops such as those centred on picture books and creative writing, an exhibition by youngsters, and shows. Among them is also the two-session programme "A Night at the... Library", which takes place from the evening until the following morning at the IPOR library that will feature workshops, reading sessions and dramatisations, with developing joy around books and stimulating interest in reading among its aims.

The programmes are either held in Portuguese, sometimes also in English or Chinese.

IPOR Director Patricia Quaresma noted in the programme introduction

that this year's theme invites youngsters and their families to "explore and appreciate the place where they live, fostering a renewed sense of belonging and encouraging them to take a keen and curious interest in the community that welcomes them".

She added: "Through a diverse programme spanning literature, music, the visual arts, the performing arts and theatre, the festival will seek to awaken in young people an interest in the history, culture, geography and daily life of their city, whilst stimulating critical thinking and creativity".

For more details, visit <https://ipor.mo/>.

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# Macau's 'Jacone's Polyphony' to shine at 61<sup>st</sup> Venice Biennale

Interview by William Chan

Macau is poised to make a cultural statement at the 61<sup>st</sup> International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia.\* Macau will present "Jacone's Polyphony,"\*\* an exhibition curated by Feng Yan and Ng Sio Ieng, featuring the works of three contemporary local artists: Fok Hoi Seng, O Chi Wai, and Lei Fung Ieng.

This 61<sup>st</sup> Biennale in Venice, running from this Saturday, May 9 to Sunday, November 22, will be showcased across Venice, primarily at the historic Giardini and Arsenale venues. The curators told the *Post* in a recent online interview that they aim to bridge 17<sup>th</sup>-century Macau with the contemporary art world, offering a unique perspective on cultural integration and dialogue within a globalised context. "The exhibition centres on the remarkable life of Wu Li, also known as Jacone, a prominent figure from the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. Wu Li was not merely one of the 'Six Masters of the Early Qing,' but a pioneer of cross-cultural self-awareness," they said.

"Wu Li's journey from a Jiangnan literatus to a Catholic, his unfulfilled aspiration to study theology in Rome, and his eventual stay in Macau are central to the narrative," according to Feng and Ng. In Macau, Wu Li adopted a Portuguese name and authored "San Ba Ji," reinterpreting Western hymns through Chinese folk melodies.

According to DeepSeek, Jiangnan is a traditional geographic region in southern China, generally defined as the area south of the lower Yangtze River, including parts of modern-day Shanghai, southern Jiangsu, northern Zhejiang, and southern Anhui. It is historically and culturally known for its prosperous rice cultivation, abundant waterways, and rich literary and artistic heritage.

The curators also emphasised that Macau has always been more than a simple East-West meeting point. It is a crucible for cultural translation, faith integration, and overlapping identities. "Wu Li's story reflects the city's spirit, documenting a Chinese intellectual's encounter with, acceptance of, and reshaping by foreign cultures."

They noted that Wu Li's narrative embodies Macau's unique genetic makeup as a conduit for East-West exchange, transforming 17<sup>th</sup>-century cross-cultural practices into a spiritual theme that contemporary art can interpret and international audiences can empathise with.

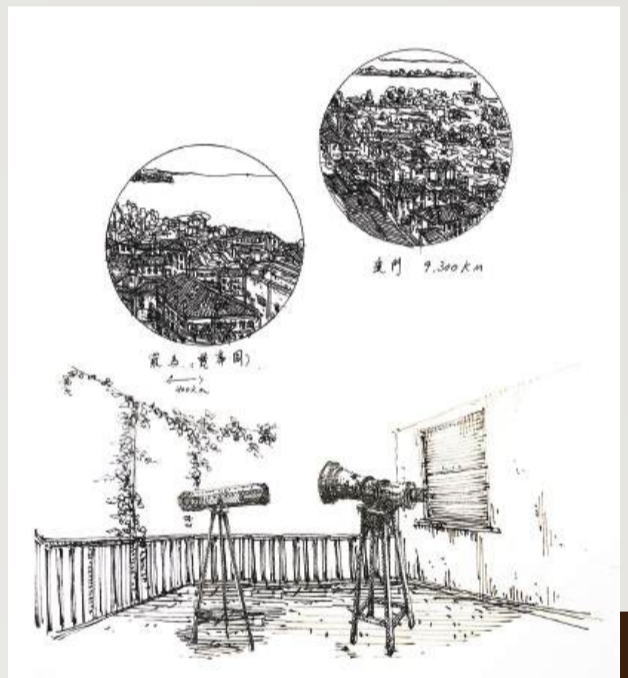
The exhibition's title, "Jacone's Polyphony," is key to its conceptual framework. The curators explained that polyphony signifies a harmonious interplay of multiple voices, each distinct yet contributing to a unified whole. "This mirrors Wu Li's own life, where his identities as a literatus and a Catholic, traditionalist and believer, Chinese and Western, Jiangnan and Macau, coexisted without conflict."

Wu Li's life trajectory and spiritual aspirations provide the linear structure for the exhibition. Upon this foundation, artists Fok Hoi Seng, Lei Fung Ieng, and O Chi Wai layer their distinct artistic languages. They explore themes of 'spiritual migration,' 'spatial tracing,'\*\*\* and 'cultural translation,' respectively. "This creates a multi-voiced dialogue within the exhibition space, and the approach ensures that while individual artistic voices are clearly presented, they remain cohesive with the overarching theme. Together, they form a collective expression representing both Wu Li's multifaceted self and the essence of Macau's culture," the curators underlined.

The curatorial framework also deeply resonates with the Biennale's overarching theme, "In Minor Keys". "In our opinion, this theme calls for attention to the subdued, introspective, and subtle voices behind grand narratives, exploring forgotten individual stories and alternative possibilities within mainstream discourse," Feng and Ng noted, adding that this aligns perfectly with their vision. "Wu Li, despite his profound achievements and cross-cultural practices, has often been reductively labelled



"Silent Travelogues" by Eric Fok Hoi Seng – Photos: Feng Yan



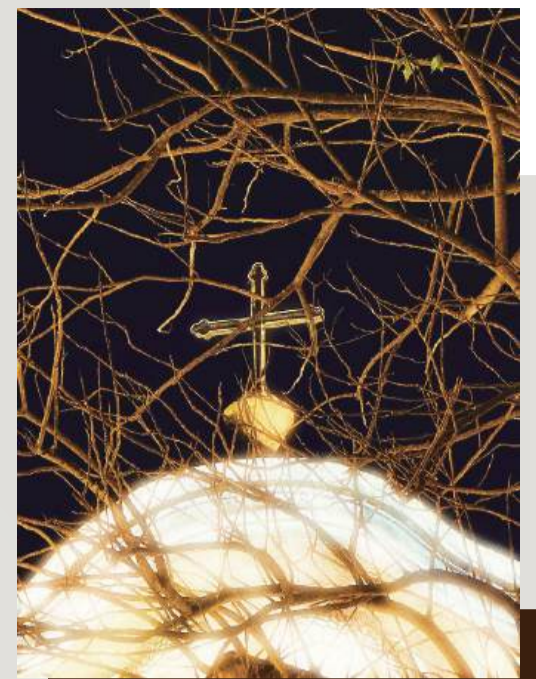
"A Place for Distant Views" by Fok Hoi Seng

as merely a 'painter' in art history. Similarly, Macau's history is frequently simplified to 'port,' 'handover,' or 'gambling'. However, Macau's true strength lies in the subtle, continuous, and everyday cultural fusion that has, over centuries, forged a unique cultural identity."

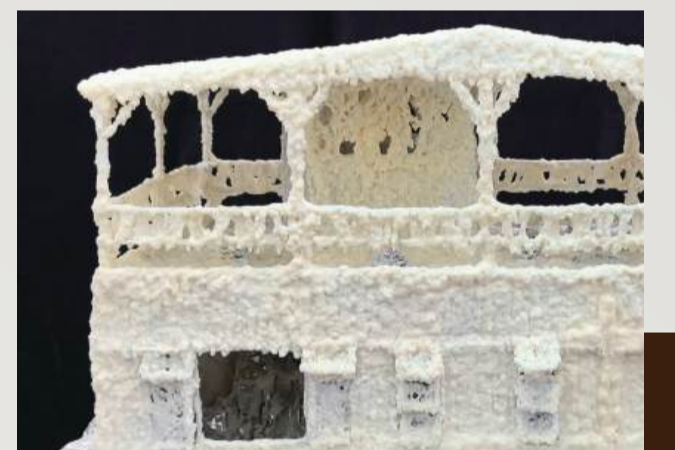
The exhibition will be held at the Arsenale (Gallery) in Venice, Italy, during the Venice Biennale. The *Post* will cover the artists' interviews next month, with photos of the gallery. For more information of the Biennale, visit: [www.labiennale.org/en](http://www.labiennale.org/en)

\*The Venice Biennale is one of the world's most prestigious and influential cultural institutions, often called "the Olympics of the art world." Founded in 1895 and held annually in even-numbered years (alternating with an architecture-focused edition in odd-numbered years), it takes place across historic venues in Venice, Italy – primarily the Giardini (home to permanent national pavilions), the sprawling Arsenale, and various palazzos and churches throughout the city. - DeepSeek

\*\* In music, polyphony (which means "many sounds" in Greek) refers to a texture consisting of two or more simultaneous lines of independent melody. Unlike a single voice singing alone or a lead singer backed by chords, polyphony treats every "voice" or instrument as an equal participant with its own distinct rhythm and melodic contour. - Gemini



"Sanqu (A Cappella Reverie)" by O Chi Wai



"Sigh of Migration" by Veronica Lei Fung Ieng



"Layers of Time" by Eric Fok Hoi Seng – Photo: Feng Yan

\*\*\*Spatial tracing refers to two distinct cutting-edge technologies: computer vision techniques that track objects in 3D space from video, and biological methods mapping gene expression within tissue structure. Key approaches include lifting 2D pixels to 3D via [\[\[SpatialTracker|https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6TcrGf97mM\]\]](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6TcrGf97mM) and analysing spatial-temporal cell domains using tools like stTrace or SpaceTracer. - Google AI Overview

# Casino takings rise 5.5 pct YoY but fall 12 pct MoM in April

Staff Reporter

Macau's 20 casinos generated gross gaming revenue (GGR) of 19.89 billion patacas (US\$2.46 billion) last month, marking a year-on-year increase of 5.5 percent, the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ) has announced.

Month-on-month, however, GGR fell by 12.0 percent, from March's 22.61 billion patacas, according to the May 1 announcement.

April produced the casino sector's lowest monthly GGR in the first four months of the year and its second lowest year-on-year growth rate, after February's 4.5 percent.

In the first four months, GGR rose year-on-year by 12.1 percent to 85.7 billion patacas.

Macau's government-concessed gaming industry is operated by six competing integrated resort (IR) operators: Sands, Galaxy, SJM, Melco, Wynn, and MGM. Under their concession agreements with the government, these operators are required to enhance their non-gaming attractions and support the promotion of Macau's cultural heritage and old-quarter renewal projects. The operators pay 35 percent of their GGR as a direct gaming tax to the government, along with an additional 5.0 percent in levies to fund various public causes.

As of the end of the first quarters, the six operators ran a total of 20 casinos, a 52.4 percent decrease from the peak of 42 casinos in 2021. This decline is primarily due to a government-ordered consolidation of the gaming industry, which included an official ban on "satellite casinos" operated by third-party enterprises in collaboration with gaming concessionaires.

During the gaming industry's three-year consolidation process, which officially ended on December 31, 2025, the gaming tables and slot machines from shuttered satellite casinos, along with their local employees, were transferred to casinos directly run by the gaming concessionaires.

Currently, SJM and Sands each own five casinos, Galaxy and Melco operate three each, while Wynn and MGM run two each.

## Baccarat generates 85.2 pct of GGR in Q1

According to the latest available DICJ

statistics, baccarat accounted for 85.2 percent of local casinos' GGR across their 16 games of chance at the end of this year's first quarter. In comparison, roulette, Europe's classic game of chance, generated a mere 0.49 percent of GGR.

At the end of last year, Macau's casinos operated 6,000 gaming tables and 12,000 gaming machines, according to the bureau.

Macau's officially concessioned casino industry got off the ground in 1849.

According to the latest available Statistics and Census Bureau (DSEC) data, the number of persons engaged in the gaming sector amounted to 53,272 at the end of last year, accounting for 10.7 percent of Macau's total labour force of 496,600 around that time (Dec 2025-Feb 2026).

In December, according to DSEC figures, the average earnings (excluding irregular remuneration) of the gaming sector's full-time employees stood at 28,020 patacas.

## GDP rises 7.1 pct in Q1

Meanwhile, according to preliminary data released by the Statistics and Census Bureau (DSEC) last week, Macau's GDP rose by 7.1 percent year-on-year in real terms in the first quarter, reaching 108.1 billion patacas. A DSEC statement said the growth was mainly due to a "notable" 13.9 percent increase in exports of services thanks to surging visitor arrivals during the Chinese New Year holidays and a raft of festive events.

## Hotel guests rise 2.6 pct to 3.67 million in Q1

According to a separate statement released by the bureau last week, Macau's number of hotel guests grew by 2.6 percent year-on-year to 3.67 million in the first quarter. Guests from the Chinese mainland (2.74 million) and Hong Kong (390,000) rose by 0.6 percent and 4.3 percent respectively. Foreign guests increased by 16.0 percent to 338,000, reaching 9.2 percent of the total number of guests in this year's first three months. South Koreans (106,000) continued to top Macau's list of international hotel guests. ■

# Gold jewellery imports leap 53.5 pct to 4.0 billion patacas in Q1

Staff Reporter

Macau's imports rose by 19.7 percent year-on-year to 37.26 billion patacas in the first quarter of the year, while exports grew by 19.7 percent to 4.18 billion patacas, resulting in a merchandise trade balance deficit of 33.08 billion patacas, the Statistics and Census Bureau (DSEC) has announced.

According to a statement by the bureau last week, gold jewellery imports increased by 53.5 pct to 4.0 billion patacas, while mobile phone imports grew by 135.3 pct to 1.30 billion patacas.

Gold jewellery imports accounted for the second-largest segment of total imports, after food and beverage imports, which fell by 5.9 percent to 5.36 billion patacas.

Re-exports made up 90.5 percent of total exports.

Macau's three top source markets for imports remained the Chinese mainland (38.7 percent), France (11.9 percent), and Italy (10.4 percent).

Some 68.9 percent of Macau's exports were shipped to Hong Kong. Only 1.2 percent and 1.5 percent of its exports went to the US and the EU, respectively.

Macau is a free port, a separate customs territory of the People's Republic of China (PRC), and a founding member of the Geneva-based World Trade Organisation (WTO). Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai met with WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala in Geneva during a four-nation, nine-day European tour last month.

Historically, Macau has served as an entrepôt between East and West since the 16th century. ■

# Fuhong Society to host National Disability Day market

Armindo Neves

The Fuhong Society of Macau (澳門扶康會) said in a statement on Monday that it will host a market in lao Hon park this Saturday to mark National Disability Day\*.

Fuhong (which means "assistance for health and well-being") is a non-profit social service organisation. It provides services and support – especially for people with intellectual disabilities and persons with mental illness, including rehabilitation and community-integration support measures.

According to the statement, 2026 also marks the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations' "Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities".

According to Wikipedia, the text was adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 13, 2006, opened for signature on March 30, 2007, and came into force on May 3, 2008.

Fuhong hopes that through the market they can not only commemorate this special day, but also bring together resources from the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) and community efforts to promote the equal participation of persons with disabilities in social life, enabling them to live fulfilling lives, the statement said.

The market brings together social service organisations, community groups, schools and businesses from across the GBA, aiming to demonstrate the 11-city conurbation's collective strength in advancing the cause of disability inclusion, the statement said.

The statement noted that the one-day market will feature charity sale booths, a health-testing zone, art workshops, stage

performances, and several thematic talks.

The market is open from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. this Saturday. ■

\*In the Chinese mainland, National Disability Day, officially known as the National Day for Assisting Disabled Persons, is observed annually on the third Sunday of May. This year, the day falls on May 17. The day is used to promote awareness, advocate for the rights of people with disabilities, and encourage society to provide practical assistance and support. – Gemini



This poster provided by Fuhong Society of Macau on Monday promotes its upcoming charity market in lao Hon park.



## Govt extends coverage in disaster insurance scheme

*Continued from p.1*

The 500,000-pataca insurance plan was added to the scheme in 2023, when the annual premiums were also lowered to 15 percent of the respective policy's insured sum from the previous 25 percent.

As in previous years, this year's insurance scheme will continue to offer a discount on the premium for companies that renew their policy, provided that they have never made a claim on the policy.

Those who renew their policy for the first year will enjoy a 20 percent discount, while those who renew their policy for the second and third year will have a 25 percent and a

30 percent discount respectively. Those who renew their policy for the fourth year or above will enjoy a 35 percent discount on the annual premium.

This year, according to yesterday's press conference, the amount of the subsidy will cover 70 percent of the annual premiums of the four plans, but with a maximum of 35,000 patacas. Therefore, after receiving the subsidy, eligible companies will need to pay 4,500 patacas, 9,000 patacas, 13,500 patacas, and 40,000 patacas for the four plans per year respectively.

According to the press conference, the government has raised the subsidy to 70

percent of the annual premiums this year from the previous 50 percent (with a maximum of 30,000 patacas).

Six insurance companies have joined this year's insurance scheme.

In the four plans, the insured company, in case of financial losses, can make a claim equivalent to the actual losses resulting from damage during the hoisting of a No.8 or above typhoon signal, a Red storm surge warning signal or above, or a Black rainstorm warning signal. According to yesterday's press conference, this year's edition of the insurance scheme has introduced one new coverage, according to which an insured

company can make a claim equivalent to 10 percent of their policy's insured sum after a No.10 typhoon signal is hoisted for at least 10 hours, even though they have not incurred any financial losses.

For instance, in such circumstance, a company that has joined the 300,000-pataca insurance plan can claim 30,000 patacas.

If a company has incurred financial losses after a No.10 typhoon signal is hoisted for at least 10 hours, it can choose to claim a payout equivalent to the actual losses, or a payout equivalent to 10 percent of its policy's insured sum, whichever is higher, according to the press conference. ■

## Vehicle fire disrupts traffic flow in HK-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge undersea tunnel

HONG KONG – A vehicle fire inside the Hong Kong-bound tube of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge undersea tunnel sparked major traffic disruption yesterday evening, prompting temporary lane closures and traffic tailbacks.

Online footage shows a tractor unit catching fire at around 7 p.m., billowing thick black smoke with stray flames dropping onto the roadway and smoke

filling the tunnel.

The Transport Department of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government confirmed partial lane closures on the Hong Kong-bound tunnel tube due to the incident, with traffic remaining congested at the scene.

Firefighters and police responded swiftly to put out the blaze.

– Xinhua

## Immersive opera breaks boundaries in Italian-style complex in Tianjin

TIANJIN – Dressed as the tragic heroine Violetta, the singer filled the bustling Italian Style Area with her voice. This area, located in Tianjin Municipality, is the sole well-preserved Italian-style architectural complex in Asia, bearing witness to a vibrant fusion of culture and consumption.

The Italian opera "La Traviata" is usually performed on a theater stage with elaborate sets. This time, during the five-day May Day holiday, it stepped out of the concert hall and into an urban public space, thus transforming the Italianate architectural district in Tianjin into an open-air theater.

Adapted from the novel "The Lady of the Camellias" by Alexandre Dumas fils, the opera tells the story of a tragic romance between Parisian courtesan Violetta Valery and young bourgeois Alfredo Germont.

"The show has infused classic operas with renewed vigor in urban public spaces, thereby enriching the holiday experiences of tourists," said Zhang Yiquan, a performer with the Tianjin Opera and Dance Drama Theater.

Tourists gathered and swayed gently to the music. Among the crowd stood Alberto Casartelli, an Italian who teaches at Tianjin Foreign Studies University. As a frequent visitor to the area, he told Xinhua: "I always find a bit of home here."

Casartelli added that the Baroque windows in this historic area echo the architectural lines seen in old photos of Florence, while artists sketching at outdoor cafes remind him of street painters in Venice.

"We chose classic Italian opera and staged it against authentic Italianate architecture, allowing the audience to immerse themselves in European artistic charm amid these century-old buildings," said Zheng Fang, head of the Tianjin Opera and Dance Drama Theater.

"Music has no borders. Art brings my home closer and beauty connects us across mountains and seas," Casartelli added. "Listening to this opera is wonderful. The love and struggle in the story are as moving

as the Chinese legend of 'The Butterfly Lovers,' or 'Liang Zhu' in Chinese."

As performers frequently interacted with the audience at close range, tourists commented that the fresh and intimate performance made them feel like they had truly walked into the opera and become part of the story.

"We broke the boundaries of the theater, and hope more visitors will enjoy the new interpretation and feel that art is more approachable," said Zhang.

"This is how art achieves a deep resonance with the public," noted Zheng, adding that the theater has encouraged art to move out of enclosed spaces to the city's scenic and cultural landmarks. "While strolling through parks, people may encounter a professional performance."

Beyond cultural experience, the immersive opera performance also boosted nearby businesses. Surrounded by Gothic, Roman and Baroque architecture, the Italian Style Area, built in 1902, is home to traditional restaurants, shopping malls, boutique retailers and international brand hotels, where the charm of tradition intertwines with international flair.

"I'm not just doing business. I'm passing on the culture," said Renato Pegoraro, an Italian who runs an Italian-style restaurant in the area. "We have seen many more customers during the holiday. Many visitors want to continue the Italian atmosphere and enjoy an authentic Italian meal here."

"The immersive opera has been staged continuously during the holiday, upgrading the quarter from a traditional sightseeing spot into an artistic field," said Kang Kai, general manager of a company that runs the Italian Style Area.

Kang added that the performance effectively raised the area's cultural recognition and lengthened the stay of tourists. "With a unique cultural experience, visitors' willingness to consume also increases, bringing strong consumption vitality to the area." – Xinhua

## HK's Q1 GDP surges 5.9 pct in real terms, hitting near 5-year high

HONG KONG – Hong Kong's economy posted solid growth in Q1 2026, with real GDP rising 5.9 percent year-on-year, according to advance official estimates released yesterday.

This is up from the previous quarter's revised 4.0 percent growth (originally estimated at 3.8 percent) and marks the strongest quarterly expansion in nearly five years.

Private consumption expenditure increased by 5.0 percent in real terms in the first quarter of 2026 over a year earlier, faster than the increase of 2.5 percent in the fourth quarter of 2025, showed the statistics released by the Census and Statistics Department of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government.

Gross domestic fixed capital formation increased further by 17.7 percent in real terms in the first quarter of 2026 year-on-year.

Total exports of goods measured in national accounts terms recorded an increase of 23.8 percent in real terms in the first quarter

year-on-year. Meanwhile, imports of goods measured in national accounts terms grew by 29.9 percent in real terms.

On a seasonally adjusted quarter-to-quarter comparison basis, GDP increased by 2.9 percent in real terms in the first quarter of 2026 when compared with the fourth quarter of 2025.

An HKSAR government spokesperson said that the Hong Kong economy expanded robustly in the first quarter of 2026. Looking ahead, Hong Kong's economic growth outlook remains positive, underpinned by strong global demand for AI-related electronics, sustained growth in visitor arrivals and robust cross-boundary financial activities.

In response to the downside risks to the economic outlook amid the persistent tensions in the Middle East, targeted measures have been taken to safeguard energy supply stability and mitigate the impacts on affected sectors, the spokesperson said. – Xinhua



Tourists experience rock climbing during the May Day holiday in Ordos, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, on Sunday. The Chinese mainland's five-day May Day holiday ended yesterday.

– AFP

## Beijing receives over 18 million tourist visits during May Day holiday

BEIJING – The nation's capital city of Beijing received 18.83 million tourist visits during the five-day May Day holiday, up 5.1 percent year on year, the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism said yesterday.

The total tourism revenue hit 22.36 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 6.6 percent, according to the bureau.

The city also recorded 128,000 inbound tourist visits, rising 22.3 percent from the same period of last year, and inbound tourism

spending reached 1.38 billion yuan, up 22.6 percent year on year.

During the holiday, Beijing rolled out more than 2,000 cultural and tourism activities featuring artistic performances, scenic spot tours, popular science research trips, and trendy fairs.

The city held 1,684 sessions of 332 offline commercial performances, with total box office revenue reaching around 260 million yuan, official data showed. – Xinhua

## Comprehensive medical efforts underway after deadly Hunan fireworks plant blast

CHANGSHA — Hunan Province is pooling top-tier medical resources to treat people injured in a fireworks factory explosion in the city of Liuyang on Monday, which has left 26 people dead and 61 others injured, including six with severe injuries.

Right after the blast, Hunan provincial and Changsha municipal health authorities immediately mobilized a multi-disciplinary expert team from leading medical institutions, covering intensive care, burns, orthopedics, emergency medicine, neurosurgery and respiratory, to guide treatment work at hospitals in Liuyang, a county-level city under the jurisdiction of Changsha, the capital city of Hunan.

Most of the injured are suffering from head injuries and fractures. Among the six severely injured patients, a middle-aged woman with a penetrating chest injury received emergency external fixation surgery. "We managed to stabilize her blood pressure and vital signs, and her condition is now

stable after meticulous treatment," said an intensive care physician involved in the rescue.

According to Tao Cheng, an orthopedics expert with the Second Xiangya Hospital of Central South University, more than 20 patients were admitted to the People's Hospital of Liuyang. Some of them received fracture fixation and hemopneumothorax surgery on Monday night, while three patients with minor injuries were discharged yesterday morning.

"We have deployed high-end life support equipment including extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO) for critically ill patients at the first instance," said a doctor from Xiangya Hospital.

"We have pooled high-quality medical resources, and will dynamically adjust treatment measures based on the real-time condition of the injured," noted Liu Jiayong, Communist Party of China (CPC) secretary of the Changsha Municipal Health Commission.

— Xinhua

## China's zero-tariff policy reinforces long-term partnership with Africa, says researcher

Interview by Ntandoyenkosi Ncube

JOHANNESBURG — China's zero-tariff policy on imports from African countries underscores its long-standing commitment to openness and South-South cooperation, thus opening up new opportunities for trade and development, a South African researcher has said.

The initiative aligns with established frameworks under the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), Cobus van Staden, a senior researcher at the South African Institute of International Affairs, told Xinhua in a recent interview.

"It fits into long-term cooperation mechanisms that have evolved under FOCAC, including the institutionalization of 'green lanes' for agricultural trade announced at the 2024 summit," van Staden said. "It also positions China's trade policy in distinct contrast to that of the United States."

The zero-tariff policy, which covers 53 African countries with diplomatic ties to China, officially took effect on May 1, 2026. The move is aimed at expanding market access and deepening economic ties across the continent.

Van Staden, whose work focuses on China's growing geopolitical and developmental role in Africa, suggested the policy could bolster confidence among African nations as they pursue economic growth and

deeper integration into the global trading system.

"This could help integrate African countries more effectively into global trade, which is beneficial in the long run," he said. "However, while it will likely increase confidence, the actual follow-through depends on local infrastructure, logistics, and industrial planning, as well as navigating China's remaining non-tariff barriers."

Amid rising global unilateralism and trade uncertainty, van Staden said that China's zero-tariff treatment provides African countries with a relatively predictable trading partner, enhancing external resilience.

"It offers a stable alternative that could boost resilience in some cases," he said.

Regarding the impact on African industries, van Staden said success would hinge on businesses' ability to add value to raw materials and tailor products to Chinese demand and avoid direct competition with Chinese goods.

"However, meeting all these criteria simultaneously remains a significant hurdle," he added.

Analysts suggest that while the policy supports industrialization, trade diversification, and job creation, its ultimate success will depend on how effectively African nations address structural constraints to fully leverage this improved market access. — Xinhua

## Hunan orders full fireworks production suspension after fatal explosion

CHANGSHA — All fireworks enterprises in Hunan Province have been required to suspend production immediately for a full safety overhaul to eliminate potential safety risks, the provincial emergency management department said yesterday.

The overhaul followed a fireworks factory explosion in the city of Liuyang under the jurisdiction of the provincial capital of Changsha on Monday, which has left 26 people dead and 61 others injured.

Liuyang, acclaimed as China's

fireworks hub, is home to more than 400 fireworks production enterprises with annual output exceeding 50 billion yuan in 2025. The city's fireworks account for approximately 70 percent of China's total fireworks exports. — Xinhua

## State Council to set up team to probe fireworks plant blast in Hunan



Zhang Guoqing (center), a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and vice premier, leads a working team to the site of a fireworks plant explosion to guide the emergency rescue and response work on behalf of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council in Liuyang, Hunan Province, yesterday. — Xinhua

CHANGSHA — A State Council team will be established to thoroughly investigate the causes of a fireworks plant explosion in Hunan Province and hold those responsible accountable.

The explosion, which occurred at around 4:43 p.m. on Monday at a fireworks plant in Liuyang, a county-level city under Changsha, capital city of Hunan, has left 26 people dead and 61 others injured.

Zhang Guoqing, a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and vice premier, arrived in Liuyang yesterday to guide the emergency rescue and response work on behalf of the CPC

Central Committee and the State Council.

Upon arrival, Zhang immediately went to the explosion site and the local hospital and learned in detail about the search for missing persons and the treatment of the injured. He then held a meeting at the on-site command center on further improving rescue and medical treatment, handling of the aftermath and accident investigation.

Authorities in Hunan and other localities and relevant departments must draw profound lessons from the accident and solidly identify and rectify risks and hidden dangers in key industries and sectors to ensure the safety of people's lives and

property, Zhang said.

He demanded all-out efforts to search for the missing, urging deploying professional teams to conduct scientific search and rescue and preventing secondary casualties.

High-level medical personnel and resources should be mobilized to fully treat the injured, and the families of the deceased should be comforted and the aftermath handled with patience and meticulous care, he noted.

Zhang called for intensified efforts to crack down on illegal and non-compliant activities in the fireworks and hazardous chemicals industries and prevent major and serious accidents. — Xinhua

## Iranian FM to visit China today

BEIJING — Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran Seyyed Abbas Araghchi will visit China upon invitation today, a Chinese foreign

ministry spokesperson announced yesterday.

Member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China

(CPC) Central Committee and Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi will hold talks with him, the spokesperson said. — Xinhua

## China urges US to stop blockade, sanctions against Cuba: FM spokesperson

BEIJING — China urges the US to stop at once the blockade and sanctions as well as coercion and pressuring of any form against Cuba, a foreign ministry spokesperson said yesterday.

The spokesperson made the remarks in response to the US move

to ramp up sanctions against Cuba. Cuba has said that the US's illegal and unilateral coercive measures are reprehensible and ridiculous.

The spokesperson said that the US intensification of illicit and unilateral sanctions against Cuba gravely infringes on the Cuban

people's right to subsistence and development and violates the basic norms in international relations.

China firmly supports Cuba in safeguarding its national sovereignty and security, and opposes interference in Cuba's internal affairs, the spokesperson added. — Xinhua

## Suu Kyi's son urges Myanmar to provide 'proof of life'

PARIS – The son of Myanmar's deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi yesterday demanded France's help in seeking independently verified proof of his mother's life after she was transferred to house arrest, her lawyers said.

The country's junta chief-turned-president Min Aung Hlaing on Thursday ordered the 80-year-old Nobel Peace Prize winner to be moved, five years after putting her

into detention in a coup.

But her son, Kim Aris, says he has still not heard from his mother, who remains massively popular inside Myanmar.

"I implore France to join my call so that we may obtain independently verified proof of life, and so that her fundamental rights are guaranteed: appropriate medical care, access to her lawyers and to her family," he wrote in

a letter addressed to French President Emmanuel Macron seen by AFP.

Suu Kyi's lawyer, Francois Zimeray, said that Aris handed the letter to France's Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot at a meeting yesterday.

"We have had no proof of life, no photos for years, not even any indication that she was actually transferred. We still don't know where she is," he told AFP.

The office of Min Aung Hlaing on Thursday shared an undated photograph appearing to show Suu Kyi sitting flanked by two men in uniform.

"But we don't know if it's real or if it's AI," Zimeray said.

Lawyer Catalina de la Sota, also representing Suu Kyi, added: "We cannot imagine that she is no longer alive, but why is she being kept in total secrecy, in violation of all

international conventions? We are worried about her health."

Min Aung Hlaing toppled Suu Kyi's elected government in 2021, detaining her on a host of charges which rights groups say were concocted to sideline her.

The ensuing civil war has killed thousands and displaced millions in the southeast Asian country of roughly 50 million. – AFP

## 'Super El Niño' raises fears for Asia reeling from Middle East conflict

Sara Hussein

BANGKOK – Already reeling from the effects of conflict in the Middle East, Asia is now facing the prospect of strong El Niño conditions that could spike energy demand, sap hydropower, and damage crops.

El Niño is a naturally occurring climate phenomenon that brings worldwide changes in winds, air pressure, and rainfall patterns.

Last week, the United Nations' weather and climate agency said El Niño conditions could develop as soon as May to July.

The World Meteorological Organisation, meanwhile, said early signs indicated the event could be particularly strong, with some dubbing the impending event a "super El Niño", although the term is not used by scientists.

That is not good news for Asia, parts of which are traditionally heavily affected by the heatwaves, drought and heavy rains that El Niño can bring.

The phenomenon essentially shifts traditional weather patterns around, for example moving rain that normally falls over Indonesia out to sea, leaving the country vulnerable to drought and wildfires.

El Niño occurs around every two to seven years and is forecast based on sea temperatures.

"The subsurface anomaly that we're seeing so far is pretty strong," said Peter van Rensch, a climate scientist at Australia's Monash University.

"It does look a little bit like what we saw in the 1997/98 event, and that was probably the strongest El Niño," he told AFP.

There are still plenty of uncertainties, and van Rensch cautioned it was possible an El Niño might not develop at all.

### Catastrophic impacts

But the 1997 El Niño brought catastrophic impacts, including extreme drought and devastating wildfires in Indonesia that burned through millions of hectares and created regional air pollution.

Authorities there have already identified peatlands at risk, and warned the country could see its lowest rainfall in 30 years.

The warnings come with Asia buckling under the strain of an energy supply crunch and fears over shortages of fertiliser and other industrial and agricultural components which pass through the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran has effectively closed the strategic waterway since the United States and Israel launched attacks on the country on February 28, disrupting global fuel supplies.

Hotter weather will strain energy grids already experiencing fuel shortages, as populations seek to cool homes and workplaces, warned Haneea Isaad, energy finance specialist at the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis.

"For countries that are highly dependent on the Strait of Hormuz for oil and gas deliveries and other trade, strained supply will lead to further fuel rationing, demand-side management and a reduction in economic activities... impacting overall GDP growth," she told AFP.

The droughts that El Niño can bring to parts of the region also pose a threat to countries that are highly dependent on hydropower, said Dinita Setyawati, senior energy analyst for Asia at the Ember thinktank.

"Most ASEAN countries use a lot of hydropower," she warned, highlighting Mekong countries, Nepal, and parts of Malaysia as particularly vulnerable because of

their dependence on the sector.

The risks were laid bare in 2022, when a heatwave in China saw hydropower generation in Sichuan fall over 50 percent, creating shortages that impacted households and industry alike.

### Agriculture risks

Hotter, drier conditions will also create fresh risks for agriculture, already under pressure as the ongoing conflict raises the costs of fertiliser and fuel needed for farming equipment.

"If crop prices do not rise enough to offset these higher input and shipping costs, producer margins will be squeezed, raising the likelihood of lower fertiliser application and weaker yields," warned BMI, a unit of the Fitch Solutions research company.

"This would intensify food price inflation and worsen food insecurity, especially in import-dependent and climate-vulnerable markets."

For some parts of Asia, an El Niño can bring bouts of intense rain and provoke flooding, which could impact sectors like southern China's late-season rice harvest, added Isaad.

How climate change affects the emergence and strength of El Niño is still not well understood.

But research shows climate change itself will bring more frequent intense heatwaves, as well as sudden heavy rainfall that can cause flooding.

So, experts said countries across the region should further insulate energy systems against more frequent disruptive weather events by diversifying and greening their grids.

"Solar and wind, coupled with batteries, provide a more resilient infrastructure than a centralised fossil infrastructure," said Setyawati. – AFP



Domestically produced Jindallae mobile phones are displayed at a stall during the 24th Pyongyang Spring International Trade Fair opening at the Central Youth Hall in Pyongyang, North Korea on Monday. – AFP

## School bullies in Singapore face caning

SINGAPORE – School bullies in Singapore face caning under new guidelines, but the education minister said yesterday it would be meted out only as a last resort with strict safeguards.

Human rights groups regularly criticise Singapore for the use of corporal punishment, which remains part of both the school system and criminal justice, but authorities have defended it as a deterrent to crime and serious misconduct.

Caning was discussed in parliament yesterday after legislators asked how it would be used in relation to bullying in schools.

The debate followed stricter guidelines against serious student misconduct, including bullying, unveiled by the education ministry last month.

Under the guidelines, offenders could face between one and three strokes of the cane.

"Our schools use caning as a disciplinary measure if all the other measures are inadequate, given the gravity of the misconduct," Education Minister Desmond Lee said yesterday.

"They follow strict protocols to ensure safety for the student. For instance, caning must be approved by the principal and administered only by authorised teachers," he said.

"Schools will consider factors such as the maturity of the student and if caning will help the student learn from his mistake and understand the gravity of what he has done."

The punishment is given only to boys, per "the Criminal Procedure Code, which states that women shall not be punished with caning", Lee said.

Caning in Singapore is a legacy from British colonial rule, but Britain has long abolished corporal punishment.

After the caning is meted out, the school will "monitor the student's wellbeing and progress", including providing counselling, Lee said.

According to a World Health Organisation report last year "there is now overwhelming scientific evidence that corporal punishment of children carries multiple risks of harm and has no benefits". – AFP



Japan's Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi (centre right) stands up to check the microphone of Philippines' Defence Secretary Gilbert Teodoro Jr. (centre left) during a bilateral meeting in Manila yesterday. – AFP

## Thailand cancels maritime energy agreement with Cambodia

BANGKOK – Thailand cancelled a 25-year-old agreement with neighbour Cambodia on overlapping maritime claims and energy exploration yesterday, the Thai prime minister said, drawing a sharp rebuke from Phnom Penh.

The Southeast Asian nations have disputed the demarcation of their 800-kilometre land border, a legacy of the French colonial era, as well as maritime territories, for decades.

They signed a memorandum of understanding, known as MoU 44, in 2001 to establish a framework for joint oil and gas exploration in areas of overlapping claims in the

Gulf of Thailand.

Thailand's energy ministry has estimated future revenues from oil and natural gas in the overlapping claims area to be worth around US\$300 billion.

The Thai cabinet approved the MoU cancellation yesterday, with Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul citing a long-standing stalemate in implementing the agreement.

He also said the move was not related to border clashes between the two countries that killed dozens of people last year.

"It is part of my policy, as the agreement has stalled for 25 years," Anutin told reporters.

New talks would be needed to negotiate an updated agreement that aligned with his government's agenda, he said.

Cambodia's Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn condemned "Thailand's unilateral rejection", calling it "a departure from the spirit and political will" of the maritime deal.

He said Cambodia would begin a dispute resolution process under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Thailand's Foreign Minister Sihanak Phuangketkeow said yesterday that talks with Cambodia on their border dispute would continue but offered no timeline. – AFP

## Japan's child population hits new low, down for 45<sup>th</sup> straight year

TOKYO – The population of children under the age of 15 in Japan has shrunk to an estimated 13.29 million as of April 1, down by 350,000 from the previous year, hitting a record low, according to government data released Monday, a day before Japan's national Children's Day.

The decline has continued for a 45<sup>th</sup> consecutive year despite the Japanese government's efforts to tackle the falling birthrate, including expanded financial support for child-rearing households.

The ratio of children under 15 in the total population fell by 0.3 percentage points from a year earlier to 10.8 percent, also the lowest since comparable data became available in 1950, according to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications.

The figures, including foreign residents, were calculated based on population estimates derived from a national census conducted every five years.

By gender, there were 6.81 million boys and 6.48 million girls, according to the data.

By age, 3.09 million children were 12 to 14, compared with 2.13 million aged 0 to 2, suggesting a continuing decline in births.

The number of children born in Japan in 2025, including foreign nationals, dropped to a record low of 705,809, marking the 10<sup>th</sup> straight year of decrease, according to preliminary data released by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare.

Japan's child population has been on a downward trend since 1982, following its peak of 29.89 million in 1954. A second baby boom occurred between 1971 and 1974.

According to a United Nations survey conducted at various times, Japan ranks second lowest in the proportion of children among 38 countries with populations of 40 million or more, with South Korea recording the lowest figure at 10.2 percent.

– Xinhua

## Nepal's PM justifies banning party-linked unions, student groups

KATHMANDU – Nepal's newly elected Prime Minister Balendra Shah rejected yesterday criticism of his ban on trade and student unions linked to political parties, insisting the move would not infringe on rights.

Shah, 36, a rapper-turned-politician, was elected in March in the first polls since deadly anti-corruption protests last year toppled the government.

On the recommendation of Shah's cabinet, President Ram Chandra Paudel issued ordinances over the weekend banning civil service trade unions and student organisations affiliated with political parties.

Student groups have opposed the decision and asked the government to reverse the ban.

"This is an effort to take the country out of party control and bring it to the institutional path," Shah said in a post on social media.

"This is an effort to free the school and bureaucracy from an infection of parties."

Lokesh Kumar Khadka, president of Free Student Union at Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus, told AFP that "all the student unions condemn this decision, this is completely wrong".

"The prime minister is displaying a dictatorial nature by not giving space to free political ideology within universities," Khadka said.

Shah said in his post that no rights would be harmed, arguing the ban would enable campus groups to benefit students and employees rather than political parties.

It would also "strengthen professional freedom" by prioritising merit over "party affiliation" in public sector appointments and promotions, the prime minister added.

Khadka said that student unions have played a key role in Nepal's political history and would "continue protests in the streets" against actions they deem unjust.

– AFP

## Kangaroos took unusual evolutionary path to grazing: Australian study

CANBERRA – Thick tooth enamel helped kangaroos chart an unconventional evolution story, compared to herbivores on other continents, an Australian study has found.

The study, published in *Science*, analyzed fossilized kangaroo teeth spanning millions of years and found that kangaroos, the continent's most diverse and common herbivores, evolved an unusual solution to the challenge of feeding on grasses with molars reinforced by thickened enamel, said a statement of Australia's Flinders University released Monday.

The evolutionary history of kangaroos led them to adapt in a very different way to the rise of grasslands compared with hoofed mammals like deer and horses, which dominate most other continents, said study lead author Aidan Couzens, a research associate at Flinders University.

Unlike grazing animals such as horses and deer, which chew side-to-side and evolved high-crowned teeth, kangaroos slice food vertically, Couzens said, adding this chewing style revealed



This photo taken on November 23, 2025 shows kangaroos at Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary in Brisbane, Australia. Established in 1927, Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary houses more than 100 koalas and approximately 70 other native Australian species.

– Xinhua

that kangaroos had a conveyor belt of cheek teeth with thick enamel.

"Feeding on grasses wears down teeth more rapidly than other kinds of plants do, because they're often covered in dust and their blades contain thousands of tiny silica particles," he said.

"In some ways, the evolutionary history of herbivorous mammals in Australia is upside down because

the vertical chewing herbivores (i.e., kangaroos) win out whereas the reverse occurred on the northern continents," Couzens said.

The study suggests evolution is not always predictable. Competing marsupial herbivores better suited to grazing declined before grasslands spread, leaving the playing field open for kangaroos to take advantage.

– Xinhua



India's Prime Minister and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Narendra Modi (centre) waves to supporters at party headquarters to deliver a victory speech, in New Delhi on Monday. The BJP has emerged victorious in the tally of the West Bengal and Assam state assembly election results. Modi has dominated national politics for years, but analysts say this week's election victory in opposition-held West Bengal state could mark a watershed moment for his party's Hindu nationalist agenda.

– AFP

## 2 rescuers among 3 killed in rough seas off Australia

SYDNEY – Two lifeboat crew racing to a stricken yacht off eastern Australia died when their vessel capsized in heavy seas, police said yesterday.

The body of a third man, who is yet to be identified, was found on the shore nearby.

A crew of six sped to the yacht in distress on Monday evening near a breakwater off Ballina, a town about eight hours' drive north of Sydney.

Their lifeboat capsized in

"extremely treacherous" ocean conditions with a 2.5 metre swell, New South Wales police superintendent Joe McNulty told journalists.

"Some of the Marine Rescue crew were trapped in the hull. Some were ejected from the vessel and, unfortunately, two lives have been lost," he said.

The volunteer lifeboat crew members who died were aged 62 and 78.

The stricken yacht hit the breakwater and broke up, police said.

The body of a man believed to be in his mid-50s was recovered from the sand nearby and was yet to be formally identified, they said.

Police said an investigation had been opened into the accident.

"Last night was the darkest night ever experienced by Marine Rescue New South Wales," said Todd Andrews, head of the service.

"These two men were serving their local community and have made the ultimate sacrifice to help others."

– AFP

## Pakistani FM says mediation efforts continue to end Mideast conflict

ISLAMABAD – Pakistan's Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar said yesterday that efforts are ongoing to help end the conflict between the United States and Iran, expressing confidence that mediation efforts could yield "significant progress."

Addressing ambassadors and members of the diplomatic corps here, Dar said Pakistan has been engaging both sides to secure a ceasefire and promote dialogue, stressing that the goal is to reach a peaceful settlement acceptable to all parties.

"Our goal as mediators is to

persuade both sides to reach a peace agreement, something the region and the world need," he said, expressing hope that ongoing consultations, supported by multiple countries, would help resolve the conflict in a "win-win" manner. (More on Middle East war on p.10)

– Xinhua



A Taliban security personnel stands guard as others destroy a poppy plantation in the Yafat Sulfa district of Badakhshan province, Afghanistan on Monday.

– AFP

# Israel court extends Gaza flotilla activists' detention

Ahikam Seri

ASHKELON – An Israeli court yesterday extended the detention of two foreign activists taken from a Gaza-bound flotilla by six days, a lawyer representing them said.

Spanish national Saif Abu Keshek and Brazilian Thiago Avila appeared before a court in the southern city of Ashkelon for their second hearing, after being brought to Israel for questioning last week.

The extension is to allow police more time to interrogate them, the pair's lawyer said.

The two, held in a prison in Ashkelon, were among dozens of activists aboard a Gaza-bound flotilla intercepted by Israeli forces in international waters off the coast of Greece last Thursday.

The other detained activists were taken to the Greek island of Crete and released.

Representatives for Avila and Abu Keshek have accused Israeli authorities of abusing the two men, who have been on hunger strike for the past six days.

The flotilla's vessels had set sail from France, Spain and Italy with the aim of breaking Israel's blockade of Gaza and delivering humanitarian aid to the war-ravaged Palestinian territory.

At a previous hearing on Sunday,

the court extended their detention by two days.

During yesterday's hearing, both men appeared in the courtroom with their legs shackled, an AFP journalist reported.

"The court granted a second extension... a six-day extension, which means the next hearing will be on Sunday," said Hadeel Abu Salih, a lawyer with Israeli rights group Adalah, which represents the activists.

"The court gave the police what they asked for and gave them the green light to continue with this illegal measure."

## Abuse claims

Abu Salih said the extension was granted after police requested more time to interrogate the pair.

"We see this as an attempt to criminalise any solidarity with the Palestinian people and any attempt to break the illegal siege on Gaza," she said, adding that Adalah plans to appeal the decision before a district court.

"We have been told by Thiago and Saif that they [Israeli police] are trying all the time to connect the humanitarian aid with Hamas to present it as a service to Hamas."

Spain has reiterated a call for the "immediate release" of Abu Keshek,



Israeli security officers escort Spanish-Palestinian activist Saif Abu Keshek into a court room in Ashkelon yesterday. – AFP

a Spanish national of Palestinian origin, and demanded "that all his rights be respected", foreign ministry sources in Madrid said.

Avila's wife said her husband remains in custody based on mere suspicions.

"The judge relied on 'confidential information' to justify the continuation of these interrogations, yet neither he nor his lawyer has been granted access to the substance of that material," Lara Souza told AFP.

"This constitutes a clear violation of the right to a defence."

Abu Salih also said presenting

the pair before a civilian court was a "way of spreading fear and making activists reconsider their participation" in future flotillas.

In a separate statement, Adalah alleged that the two men faced ongoing abuse in detention.

They were being held in "total isolation, subjected to 24/7 high-intensity lighting in their cells and kept blindfolded whenever they were moved, including during medical examinations", Adalah said.

## No formal charges

Israeli authorities have rejected the allegations. – AFP

According to Adalah, the authorities have accused the pair of several offences, including "assisting the enemy during wartime" and "membership in and providing services to a terrorist organisation".

No formal charges have so far been filed against them.

Adalah's lawyers have challenged the state's jurisdiction, arguing there had been an "unlawful abduction" of the two activists in international waters.

Israel's foreign ministry says both individuals were affiliated with the Popular Conference for Palestinians Abroad (PCPA), a group accused by Washington of "clandestinely acting on behalf of" Palestinian militant group Hamas.

The ministry said Abu Keshek was a leading PCPA member, and that Avila was also linked to the group and "suspected of illegal activity".

The Global Sumud Flotilla's first voyage last year was also intercepted by Israeli forces off the coasts of Egypt and Gaza.

Israel controls all entry points into Gaza, which has been under an Israeli blockade since 2007.

Throughout the Gaza war that started in October 2023, there have been shortages of critical supplies in the territory, with Israel at times cutting off aid entirely. – AFP



A woman waves an Iranian flag in front of an anti-US billboard referring to US President Donald Trump and the Strait of Hormuz, at Valiasr Square in Tehran yesterday. Iran's chief negotiator in talks with the United States warned yesterday that his country has "not even started" in its standoff over the Strait of Hormuz. – AFP

## Trump urges Iran to 'do the smart thing'

WASHINGTON, DC – US President Donald Trump urged Iran yesterday to "do the smart thing" and make a deal to end the war, saying even as a ceasefire teetered that he did not want to kill more Iranians.

"They should do the smart thing, because we don't want to go in and kill people. Really don't," Trump told reporters in the Oval Office when asked about Iran. "I don't want to, it's too tough."

Trump declined to say what Iran would have to do to formally violate the nearly month-long truce. Iran has in recent days fired missiles and drones at US forces and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

"You'll find out," he said. "They know what to do. They know what not to do, more importantly, actually."

The US leader also accused Iran of "playing games" with a deal to end the war – an agreement which Trump says must ensure that Tehran cannot develop a nuclear weapon.

"What I don't like about Iran is they'll talk to me with such great respect, and then they'll go on television, they'll say, 'We did not speak to the president,'" said Trump.

"So they play games, but let me just tell you, they want to make a deal, and who wouldn't? When your military is totally gone, we could do anything we want to them." – AFP

## UK's 30-year bond rate highest since 1998

LONDON – The interest rate on 30-year UK government bonds reached the highest level since 1998 yesterday, as investors fretted over soaring energy prices caused by the Middle East war.

The yield surged to more than 5.77 percent as UK traders caught up with gains across international bond markets on Monday when Britain had a public holiday.

The UK rate has won support also from expectations that the Labour party led by Prime Minister Keir Starmer will suffer big losses in local elections tomorrow.

"There is some catch-up in the UK market after [Monday's] holiday," Jane Foley, Rabobank's head of foreign exchange strategy, told AFP.

"While the move in the... market appears to be primarily

driven by fears of rising hostilities in the US/Iran war, the UK is facing domestic political risks in the form of this week's election."

Foley said that "betting odds strongly suggest that PM Starmer will be replaced this year."

"Odds also favour a candidate from the left wing of the party which could create headwinds for UK asset markets," she added.

– AFP

## UAE air defences 'actively engaging' Iran missiles, drones: ministry

DUBAI – The United Arab Emirates (UAE) said yesterday its air defences were engaging missiles and drones coming from Iran for the second consecutive day, weeks into a fragile ceasefire in the Middle East war.

"UAE air defence systems are actively engaging with missiles and UAV threats," the defence ministry said in a statement on X, adding that they had "come from Iran".

On Monday, an Iranian drone attack caused a fire, injuring three

people at an energy installation in Fujairah, close to the blockaded Strait of Hormuz, the vital waterway that is the focus of tensions between the US and Iran.

Fujairah is the UAE's main oil export terminal bypassing the Strait of Hormuz.

The oil-rich UAE, a staunch US ally on Iran's doorstep, has borne the brunt of Tehran's retaliation, having been targeted by more than 2,800 missiles and drones during the war. – AFP

## Portugal arrests 15 police officers in rape, torture probe

LISBON – Another 15 officers suspected of torturing and abusing vulnerable people were arrested in Portugal yesterday, in a widening investigation into abuses of police power in the Iberian country.

With the suspects taken into custody yesterday, a total of 24 police officers are now under investigation for alleged acts of “aggravated torture, rape, abuse of power and aggravated assault”, according to a police statement.

Investigators carried out some 30 searches yesterday, including in

two police stations in the Portuguese capital Lisbon where the abuses are believed to have taken place.

According to the Portuguese press, the victims were mainly undocumented foreigners, homeless people or drug users.

When questioned about the case on Monday, police director Luis Carrilho said: “We enforce a zero-tolerance policy toward cases of misconduct.”

“Citizens can continue to have confidence in the police,” he insisted. –AFP

## EU watchdog says pesticide risk in food ‘remains low’

ROME – The EU’s food safety agency said yesterday that the risk to consumers from pesticide residues found in food “remains low” but an activist group accused the watchdog of underestimating the dangers.

Following its analysis of samples from across Europe, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) said it found pesticide residue in most food sold in the EU.

But it said this exceeded maximum levels in only 2.4 percent of cases.

“The risk to human health from pesticide residues remains low,” it said.

Martin Dermine, head of Pesticide Action Network (PAN) Europe, a non-governmental group, said the results “remain concerning”.

“Mounting scientific evidence

shows that exposure to pesticide residues via food are linked to higher risks of developing chronic diseases such as cancer, and can lead to infertility,” he said in a statement.

The EFSA report was based on 9,842 samples collected in 2024.

It found that 54.5 percent of samples contained one or more pesticide residues within maximum residue levels.

It said these maximum levels were only exceeded in 2.4 percent of the samples.

Oranges, grapes, strawberries and apples were found to have the highest number of multiple pesticide residues, the report said.

PAN Europe said the EU should “reduce allowable exposure limits” and said some of the pesticides identified were “harmful to the development children’s brains”. –AFP

## Burkina bans French TV channel over ‘disinformation’

Abidjan, Ivory Coast

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast – Burkina Faso has banned French television channel TV5 Monde, accusing it of “disinformation” over its coverage of jihadist violence in the country and neighbouring Mali, the media regulatory authority announced yesterday.

Since Captain Ibrahim Traore came to power in a coup in September 2022, several foreign media outlets have been suspended or banned in Burkina Faso.

TV5 Monde has already faced suspensions on two previous occasions, in April and June 2024.

The High Council for Communication made its latest decision yesterday, banning the broadcasting of programmes by TV5 Monde in the west African nation.

It followed “the observation of numerous breaches of the law, ethics and professional conduct in the handling of topics related to the fight against terrorism” in Burkina and relating to attacks late last month in Mali, council head Wendingoudi Louis Modeste Ouedraogo said in the statement.

“The offences committed, which involve disinformation and the glorification of terrorism, were identified in several editions of the television news, from April to May 2026,” he said.

TV5 Monde was also suspended in Mali, similarly led by a junta, in May last year until further notice, after the military authorities accused it of lacking impartiality in its coverage of an opposition protest.

It had already been suspended for three months the previous year. –AFP

## US to assess new AI models before their release

NEW YORK – The US government yesterday announced in a policy shift that it will have access to tech giants’ new AI models to evaluate them before they are released.

The agreements with Google DeepMind, Microsoft and xAI come after the Trump administration had earlier adopted a hands-off approach to regulation as Silicon Valley rolled out artificial intelligence technology that is changing modern life at breakneck pace.

The partnerships are based on agreements reached when Joe Biden was in power, and have been renegotiated under Donald Trump, officials said.

The *New York Times* reported on Monday the White House was discussing an executive order that would establish a working group of tech executives and government officials to examine potential review procedures for new AI models.

The Center for AI Standards and Innovation (CAISI), which is part of the Commerce Department, said it “will conduct pre-deployment evaluations and targeted research to better assess frontier AI capabilities and advance the state of AI security.”

It was not immediately clear if the agreements announced yesterday are linked to the working group that *The New York Times* said was being discussed.

The CAISI replaced the US Artificial Intelligence Safety Institute created by the Biden administration in 2023.

President Trump had positioned himself as a champion of unfettered AI development, rolling back Biden-era safety evaluation requirements and casting regulation as a threat to US competitiveness with China.

The Biden administration had issued an executive order in 2023 that required AI developers to share safety test results with the

government and directed federal agencies to set standards for the technology. But Trump rescinded these measures shortly after taking office.

The immediate catalyst was the emergence of a powerful new AI model called Mythos, built by the San Francisco start-up Anthropic.

The company has described the model’s ability to identify software security vulnerabilities as potentially leading to a cybersecurity reckoning and has declined to release it publicly.

“Independent, rigorous measurement science is essential to understanding frontier AI and its national security implications,” said CAISI Director Chris Fall said yesterday.

US news outlets have said the National Security Agency has gained access to Mythos and is carrying out tests on it.

–AFP



US President Donald Trump speaks to young athletes as he is joined by (second row, from left to right) professional golfer Bryson DeChambeau and US Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy Jr. during a proclamation signing in the Oval Office of the White House yesterday in Washington, DC. Trump signed a presidential memorandum restoring the Presidential Fitness Test Award, which was reinstated by executive order in July 2025 and reintroduces a performance-based benchmark in physical education. –AFP

## Portugal plans to impose windfall tax on energy profits

LISBON – Portugal plans to levy a tax on windfall profits earned by energy companies due to surging prices caused by the conflict in the Middle East, the finance minister said yesterday.

Portugal was one of several EU countries that expressed an interest in putting in place such a measure, while the European Commission has also said it was looking at a coordinated approach at the European level.

“The Commission told us yesterday that it is a decision for each member state, thus we’ll revive the measures taken in 2022, adjust and improve them, and very quickly submit a proposition to parliament,” said Finance Minister Joaquim Miranda Sarmiento on the sidelines of a meeting in Brussels.

Portugal had implemented a windfall profit tax on energy firms in 2022 when Russia’s military operation in Ukraine triggered a

spike in prices.

Miranda Sarmiento said that there were significant differences from 2022, with high energy prices not having sparked considerable wider inflation yet, so it would be premature to unveil the details of the planned measures.

Portugal has already taken measures to cushion the impact of higher oil prices at the pump such as reducing taxes on diesel and petrol.

–AFP, MPD

# Race to find port for cruise ship battling deadly rodent virus

PRAIA, Cape Verde – Health authorities raced yesterday to find a port for a cruise ship battling a hantavirus outbreak, as it remained off the West African coast with passengers isolating after three people died.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) said the MV Hondius could head from Cape Verde to Spain's Canary Islands, though Spanish authorities said they wanted health data from the expedition vessel before opening up a port.

The ship had been on an adventure cruise from Ushuaia in Argentina to Cape Verde off west Africa. It has been at the centre of an international alert since Saturday after it was revealed that the rare disease – spread from infected rodents typically through urine, droppings and saliva – was suspected in three deaths.

The priority now is to evacuate two sick crew members who require urgent care – potentially to the Netherlands – and “then the ship can move”, WHO epidemic and pandemic preparedness and prevention director Maria Van Kerkhove said in Geneva.

By yesterday, two hantavirus cases had been confirmed – including in one of the fatalities – with five further suspected cases among the 147 passengers and crew, the WHO said.

Three of those seven have died, one was critically ill and three had reported milder symptoms, including one who is now asymptomatic, it said.

One of the dead, a Dutch woman, had left the ship at the Atlantic island of Saint Helena and had flown to Johannesburg where she died on April 26. The WHO said it was trying to contact people who were on the same flight.

Passengers and crew have meanwhile been in isolation on the MV Hondius, operated by Dutch company Oceanwide Expeditions, after Cape Verde authorities barred it from docking.

## Human-to-human transmission?

According to Van Kerkhove, Spanish authorities had “said that they will welcome the ship to do...



This aerial picture shows the cruise ship MV Hondius stationary off the port of Praia, the capital of Cape Verde, yesterday. – AFP

a full epidemiologic investigation”. They would also conduct a “full disinfection of the ship and... assess the risk of the passengers.”

Spain's health ministry said that a decision on where to send the vessel would be based “on the epidemiological data collected from the ship during its stopover in Cape Verde”. The Canary Islands government said it wanted the ship to be sent to mainland Spain.

Passengers from Britain, Spain and the United States, as well as crew largely from the Philippines, were among 23 nationalities on the MV Hondius.

The WHO was scrambling for answers about how hantavirus had appeared on the ship, which set off from Ushuaia on April 1.

The first person who died developed symptoms on April 6, according to the UN health agency which said it was alerted on Saturday.

Human-to-human transmission has only been reported in previous outbreaks of one specific hantavirus called Andes virus, which circulates in South America.

Van Kerkhove said the virus species had yet to be confirmed, but highlighted that the WHO had been told “there are no rats on board” the ship.

South African researchers were working sequencing the data, said Van Kerkhove, who added that “our working assumption is that it is the Andes virus”.

“We do believe that there may be some human-to-human

transmission that is happening among the really close contacts”.

## Contact tracing

The first two people to die were a Dutch couple – a man who died on April 11 and his wife who died after she disembarked in Saint Helena to accompany his body.

The wife was suffering from “gastrointestinal symptoms” and “deteriorated” during a flight to Johannesburg on April 25, the WHO said. She died the following day.

Van Kerkhove said contact tracing had been initiated for people on the flight. She stressed that human-to-human transmission typically only happened “among very close contacts”.

The ship's operator said a British passenger was in intensive care in Johannesburg. The two crew still on board – one British and one Dutch – needed urgent care, WHO said.

Van Kerkhove said the typical incubation period for the hantavirus was between one and six weeks, leading the WHO to believe that the Dutch couple, who had been travelling in South America, “were infected off the ship”.

The Hondius, she highlighted, was an expedition vessel, with passengers going ashore on Atlantic islands to do birdwatching and other activities – meaning there could be “some source of infection on the islands”.

The WHO has said the risk to the global population from the outbreak is “low”. – AFP

# ‘El Chapo’ requests transfer from US to Mexico

WASHINGTON, DC – Mexican drug lord Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán has pleaded for US court authorities to transfer him back to his country of birth, court filings showed on Monday, as he serves out a life sentence he deemed “cruel.”

Extradited in 2017 after escaping twice from Mexican prisons, Guzmán is serving a life sentence at a maximum security facility in Colorado on multiple charges including drug trafficking and money laundering.

AFP consulted three letters the co-founder of the Sinaloa cartel wrote, each one filed on Monday.

“This is a polite letter [about] the hardcore evidence that wasn't proven for my case,” Guzmán wrote in English.

In the letter directed to the Eastern District Court of New York, Guzmán asked that authorities

recognise his “rights to be request back [sic] to my country,” without clarifying if his request is to serve the rest of his sentence in Mexico.

In another missive on April 20, Guzmán complained that his requests for the documents behind his sentencing have gone unanswered.

These documents won't justify “my cruel punishment,” he added. “The verdict of my trial wasn't fair,” he said.

El Chapo said that he has been waiting for an appeal for three years, and invoked the protection of the “first to the fifth amendment.”

The former trafficker has repeatedly complained in previous prison letters of isolation, poor conditions in his cell and the lack of family visits. – AFP

\*In Spanish, “El Chapo” is a slang term that translates to “Shorty” in English. – Gemini

# Colombian guerrillas offer peace talks with Petro successor

BOGOTÁ – Colombia's largest active guerrilla group said on Monday it was open to resuming peace talks with whoever succeeds left-wing President Gustavo Petro in upcoming elections.

Petro, who will leave office in August following elections starting May 31, has failed to achieve his aim of “total peace,” which entails negotiating the disarmament of all armed groups in a country that has endured over six decades of bloodshed.

His government's talks with the National Liberation Army (ELN) came to a halt in January 2025 after the group launched an offensive against rival guerrillas in the northeast, killing over 100 people.

In an X post on Friday, Petro voiced his willingness to resume negotiations: “If the ELN decides to work with us to dismantle illicit economies, new paths to peace will open up again.”

But ELN said in a statement on Monday it would not deal with Petro again because he had used “treachery to gain military

advantages” and forged agreements with his US counterpart Donald Trump to attack Colombian drug-trafficking groups.

ELN did say it was willing to talk with the next government about its “proposal to build a National Agreement” as a path to peace.

Left-leaning Senator Ivan Cepeda, a key architect of Petro's peace strategy, is currently the poll favourite to become the next president.

Cepeda has vowed to continue negotiating with various drug-trafficking factions that rejected a landmark 2016 peace deal between the state and the now-defunct rebel army FARC.

Cepeda is trailed by right-wing candidates Abelardo de la Espriella and Paloma Valencia, both of whom oppose dialogue with armed groups and have promised a security crackdown instead.

The ELN, the oldest surviving guerrilla group in the Americas, reportedly funds its activities through drug trafficking and other illegal activities. – AFP

# 9 killed in Colombian mine explosion

BOGOTÁ – Nine miners died on Monday in an explosion inside a coal mine in central Colombia caused by a buildup of gases, according to a final toll released by the mining authority.

Mining accidents in Colombia are frequent and often fatal, especially in illegal or makeshift mines.

Monday's incident took place at a legally operated mine in the Sutatausa municipality, 72 kilometres north of the capital Bogotá.

The National Mining Agency said in a statement that six miners were rescued and nine were reported dead “following an emergency at a mine in Sutatausa, Cundinamarca.”

Cundinamarca Governor Jorge

Emilio Rey said on X that the explosion was “apparently due to a buildup of gases.”

The governor had previously said that 12 people were trapped and three had managed to escape.

Rescue workers were on their way to the site, he said, sharing images of ambulances at the mine's entrance.

Authorities were assessing gas levels in the mine before conducting rescue operations, he added.

Mining accidents in Colombia usually occur due to poor ventilation.

In the area where Monday's incident took place, illegal mines that fail to meet safety standards are also in operation. – AFP

# Death toll in Brazil small plane crash rises to 3

BELO HORIZONTE – Three people died and two others were injured on Monday after a small plane crashed into a residential building in the major Brazilian city of Belo Horizonte.

The pilot and copilot died on impact, while three other occupants were rushed to the hospital, the Minas Gerais state fire department said.

One of the injured succumbed to his injuries, while the other two remained hospitalized in stable

condition, according to the local hospital foundation.

Despite the direct impact, no one inside the building was injured and the structure showed no “apparent risk” of collapse, firefighters said.

Broadcaster TV Globo's helicopter was in the area captured footage of the aircraft's final moments as it lost altitude, banked left to avoid taller buildings, and then slammed into the three-story building and fell to a parking lot.

Firefighters said it hit the

building's stairwell, potentially avoiding more casualties.

“If it had hit the sides of the building, it could have struck an occupied apartment,” a fire department officer told the G1 news website.

Images released by firefighters show rescuers helping residents evacuate the building.

According to data from the Aeronautical Accidents Investigation and Prevention Centre, Brazil recorded 153 air accidents in 2025, with a death toll of 62. – AFP

## Football shorts

### Edin Terzic to become Athletic Bilbao coach next season



MADRID – Former Borussia Dortmund boss Edin Terzic will take charge of Athletic Bilbao next season, the club announced yesterday, following the departure of Ernesto Valverde this summer.

Terzic will arrive on a two-year deal to replace Valverde, who said in March he would step down from his role at the end of the season.

The 43-year-old Terzic has been without a club since leaving Dortmund at the end of the 2023-24 campaign, which ended with a 2-0 loss to Real Madrid in the Champions League final.

Terzic won the German Cup in 2021 in his first spell at Dortmund. He returned for a second stint as coach a year later, narrowly missing out on the Bundesliga title on the final day of the 2022-23 season.

He was also a former assistant to Slaven Bilic at West Ham and Besiktas.

The departing Valverde, who has had three tenures as Bilbao coach, ended their 40-year trophy drought when his side won the Copa del Rey in 2024.

Bilbao are currently eighth in La Liga and three points off the European places with four games left. – AFP

### FIFA invites Iran to headquarters for World Cup talks

PARIS – FIFA has invited the Iranian football federation (FFIRI) to its headquarters for talks over the country's participation at this year's World Cup, a source told AFP yesterday.

Iran's presence at the tournament, held in the United States, Canada and Mexico between June 11 and July 19, has been shrouded in uncertainty since the eruption of war in the Middle East in February following strikes by the United States and Israel.

The source said FIFA had asked the FFIRI to visit its Zurich base "by May 20 to prepare for the World Cup".

Last week, FIFA president Gianni Infantino reiterated Iran will play their World Cup games in the United States as scheduled.

"Let me start by the outset, confirming straightaway that of course Iran will be participating at the FIFA World Cup 2026," Infantino said as he addressed delegates at the FIFA Congress in Vancouver.

"And of course, Iran will play [in] the United States of America."

Iran's delegation was the only absentee from the 211-member congress after a clash with Canadian border officials.

Iranian media said FFIRI president Mehdi Taj - a former member of Tehran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) - and two colleagues flew home after being "insulted" by Canadian immigration officers.

Canada, which designated the IRGC a terrorist organisation in 2024, said individuals linked to the force were "inadmissible".

On his return home, Taj told local media he wanted a meeting with FIFA to discuss a variety of subjects.

Iran, who are due to be based in Tucson, Arizona, during the World Cup, face New Zealand, Belgium and Egypt in Group G.

The Iranians open their World Cup campaign against New Zealand in Los Angeles on June 15. – AFP

## PSG 'not here to defend' against Bayern, says Luis Enrique



MUNICH - Paris Saint-Germain coach Luis Enrique said his side's one-goal first leg lead meant "nothing" ahead of today's second Champions League semi-final at Bayern Munich.

Defending champions PSG won 5-4 in an astonishing opening leg, having conceded first and at one point held a 5-2 advantage.

The match was the highest scoring Champions League semi-final in history and Luis Enrique expected more of the same today.

"It's nothing," the Spaniard said of PSG's narrow lead.

"It's just one goal. We are ready. We know Bayern Munich can get back into the match and we can also score goals.

"And we are certainly not here to defend. We're trying to win the game."

PSG are competing in their fifth semi-final in the past seven seasons - and the third straight under Luis Enrique.

The coach said Bayern were the "strongest team we have faced" this season, but promised the French giants would be "loyal to who we are".

"I can't say Wednesday [today] will be different based on what we saw in the first leg. I don't think either team will just accept that the other is better," said the Spaniard.

"Our mentality is to win every game. We don't need to play for a particular result because we have to win."

Luis Enrique called the opening match the best he had been involved in as a coach, but

admitted he had little fun on the sidelines.

"As a top-level coach, it was very difficult to enjoy," he added.

PSG midfielder Warren Zaire-Emery said the players had as much fun as the supporters in the opening leg in Paris and expected "the same thing" in Munich.

"It was a crazy game for us. We play football to be involved in these sorts of games. It was one of the best matches the Champions League has seen," the French player said.

"The intensity, the commitment, the goals, it was simply exceptional. And we're expecting the same thing on Wednesday."

PSG return to Munich's Allianz Arena, where they won last year's final, for the first time.

Luis Enrique, who has fond memories of the stadium after eliminating Bayern on the way to winning the 2015 Champions League title with Barcelona, said returning to Munich reminded him of what PSG had achieved.

"Coming back here will always be a real pleasure because we remember what we achieved last year."

The game will be played at 3 a.m. tomorrow morning Macau time. – AFP/MPD



Paris Saint-Germain players including French forward Ousmane Dembele (right) and Spanish midfielder Fabian Ruiz (centre) take part in a training session at the Allianz Arena in Munich, southern Germany yesterday, the eve of the UEFA Champions League second-leg, semi-final against FC Bayern Munich. – AFP

## Bayern's Kompany channels 'inner tranquillity' before PSG showdown



MUNICH – Bayern Munich coach Vincent Kompany said he was in a state of "total calm" before today's Champions League semi-final second leg against holders Paris Saint-Germain.

Bayern lost 5-4 in last week's wild first leg in Paris in one of the greatest games in recent memory.

A day ahead of the biggest match of his managerial career, Kompany told reporters yesterday he was not overawed.

"It's actually a state of total calm – an inner tranquillity," Kompany said in Munich.

"I try not to let the emotions and atmosphere of the game come into play too early," he added.

The 40-year-old said he was fully focused on preparation for the match and deciding what to tell his players before the encounter.

"The time leading up to it is largely about preparation and routine - perhaps quietly searching for just the right words or phrases to use tomorrow [today]," he said.

"I am still searching, even now; I have a rough idea of what that 'right phrase' might be for the team - the one that can influence that crucial one percent, helping us find that little extra edge," he added.

Despite a spectacular game in the French capital, the former Belgium and Manchester City central defender faced criticism because his team let in five goals.

Kompany was asked whether he would emulate his former City manager Pep Guardiola who with Bayern was accused by German media of tinkering with his defence before a big European loss in 2014.

"The players need to be reinforced in what they've already been doing well all season long. And that, in terms of the details,

they perhaps need to be given something that could prove decisive in these kinds of matches," he said.

"I also played under Pep. It's simply not true that he changes everything in big games.

"That's just media nonsense. When you lose, you always have something to explain.

"When you win, you're always right," he added.

Kompany said he felt a different kind of atmosphere in Munich in the lead-up to the match after his side were crowned Bundesliga champions last month.

"Here we stand, having already experienced so many incredible moments and I believe that is precisely why the fans, too, believe that this team can pull it off," he said.

"Together, we simply want to make this moment truly unforgettable."

Bayern defender Jonathan Tah said the first leg may not have seemed like a defensive masterclass, but he enjoyed it as much as the fans.

"It was definitely a bit of a weird feeling," Tah said.

"You obviously have that feeling: 'crap, we conceded five goals'.

"I think the most important thing for me in moments like this is never to forget why I started playing football in the first place. And that was for the fun of it, and out of passion.

"That's why I'm looking forward to this game."

The game will be played at 3 a.m. tomorrow morning Macau time. – AFP/MPD



Bayern Munich's Austrian midfielder Konrad Laimer (left) and Bayern Munich's Portuguese defender Raphael Guerreiro warm up during a training session of FC Bayern Munich at their training ground in the Saebener Strasse in Munich, southern Germany yesterday, the eve of the UEFA Champions League second-leg semi-final against Paris Saint-Germain (PSG). – AFP

# China's Wu Yize wins World Snooker Championship in Crucible thriller

## Snooker

LONDON – Wu Yize became the second Chinese to win World Snooker Championship following Zhao Xintong's triumph last year, defeating England's Shaun Murphy 18-17 at the Crucible Theatre in Sheffield on Monday.

Wu, 22, also became the second-youngest Crucible winner after Stephen Hendry who was 21 in 1990. He lifted the trophy after the final, with his parents standing by his side.

"They are the true champions, since the moment I devoted myself to snooker, my father has always been my company, my mother also went through ups and downs in these years. They are and always will be my motivation," said Wu, who moved to Sheffield at 16 years old and lived in a tiny room with his father for a long time.

Wu took an early 3-0 lead before Murphy fought back to tie the first session 4-4. Breaks of 103, 89 and 91 helped Wu established a 10-7 lead after session two, before Murphy won five straight frames. Wu then dominated the next three frames to take a slender 13-12 lead into the last session.

Murphy contributed the highest break of the final in the 32<sup>nd</sup> frame with 131 points to tie 16-16, turning



Wu Yize of China kisses the trophy after winning the final match against Shaun Murphy of England at the World Snooker Championship 2026 in Sheffield, Britain, on Monday. – Xinhua

the 35-frame final into a best-of-three match. Each player won one frame, before Wu successfully potted a tricky red in the middle pocket to finish the decider with a winning break of 85.

"I'd like to congratulate Wu Yize. I hate being right - earlier this season I said he would be world champion one day. It's just a shame it is today!" joked Murphy, who won his solitary title in 2005 before finishing runner-up in his next four final appearances in 2009, 2015, 2021 and Monday.

Wu was among a record 11 Chinese players at the Crucible this year, including snooker pioneer Ding Junhui, the first Asian finalist in 2016, and defending champion Zhao Xintong, the first Asian title winner.

Wu defeated Lei Peifan, Mark Selby and Hossein Vafaei in the first three rounds, and reached the final in dramatic fashion by edging Mark Allen 17-16 in the semifinal after Allen missed the match-ball black in the 32<sup>nd</sup> frame.

– Xinhua

# Rahm eligible for Ryder Cup after deal with European Tour

## Golf

LONDON – Jon Rahm has reached a deal with the European Tour that will allow him retain his membership and remain eligible for next year's Ryder Cup at Adare Manor in Ireland.

In an agreement similar to that signed by eight other LIV golfers in February, the Spaniard will pay all outstanding fines for playing in events that clashed with European Tour tournaments.

The tour is now known as the DP World Tour.

Two-time major winner Rahm has been punished for three conflicting events this season, and has around £2 million (US\$2.7 million) in fines outstanding since he joined the Saudi breakaway circuit in 2023.

In exchange for securing conditional releases for 2026, Rahm has also said he will play in agreed European Tour events for the remainder of this year.

"The DP World Tour and Jon Rahm have come to an agreement on conditional releases to play in conflicting tournaments on LIV Golf during the remainder of its 2026 season," said a DP World Tour spokesman.

"This involves payment of all outstanding fines accrued from 2024 to date, along with participation in agreed DP World Tour tournaments (outside the majors) in the remainder of the 2026 season."

The 31-year-old, who made his Ryder Cup debut in 2018, was a captain's pick for the 2025 tournament at Bethpage Black, won by the European team.

Rahm in March accused the DP World Tour of "extorting players" as he explained why he had not signed a deal to settle his fines for playing.

Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund said last week it was withdrawing its multi-billion dollar backing of LIV Golf at the end of the season, plunging the future of the tour into doubt. – AFP

# China sweeps Australia to reach men's last-16 at table tennis team worlds

## Table tennis

LONDON – China cruised to a 3-0 victory over Australia yesterday to advance to the men's team last 16 at the 2026 ITTF World Team Table Tennis Championships Finals.

Liang Jingkun gave China the lead after recovering from a 9-6 deficit in the first game against Nicholas Lum by winning five straight points to turn it around.

Liang then took control of the match, winning the next two games 11-5 and 11-6.

"I tried to get into the match as soon as possible. My performance and feeling on the court was better than that in the past two days," Liang said.

World No. 1 Wang Chuqin made light work of the second match, beating Aditya Sareen 11-9, 11-1, 11-2 as the defending champion moved 2-0 ahead.

"I was a bit tight in the first game, but overall, I took control of the rhythm throughout the match," Wang noted.

Watched courtside by Chinese

table tennis icons Ma Long, Xu Xin and Liu Shiwen, Wang said he and his teammates felt "steady and sure."

"With so many seasoned players supporting us, it serves as a testament to the Chinese table tennis team's legacy," he added.

Lin Shidong, who at times struggled in the group stage, sealed the win with an 11-5, 11-4, 11-7 victory over Australia's Finn Luu.

"I haven't played him for a long time since the World Youth Championships [in 2021]. Actually, it was not an easy match, especially in the third game, he made changes to his serves, which put me under pressure, but I held firm to win," Lin said.

China will face Romania, which eliminated Poland 3-2 on Monday, in the next round.

Also yesterday, Chinese Taipei eased past Serbia 3-0 in the men's team round of 32, while in the women's competition, Japan swept Croatia 3-0 and Italy beat Portugal 3-1.

The men's and women's round-of-16 matches will be held today.

– Xinhua

Zheng Qinwen competes during singles first round match against Anna Bondar of Hungary at the WTA Italian Open in Rome, Italy, yesterday. Zheng rallied from one set down to defeat Bondar 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 in the first round of the WTA Italian Open yesterday, advancing to the second round after the hard-fought battle lasting 2 hours and 18 minutes. Zheng had won both of their previous meetings. In this latest encounter, the opening three games went on serve before Zheng double-faulted in the fourth game to concede a break. Bondar capitalized on the advantage and took the first set 6-3. In the second set, Zheng improved her first-serve percentage and raced to a 4-0 lead. Although Bondar responded by winning three straight games, Zheng broke again in the eighth game and closed out the set 6-3 to level the match. – Xinhua



# Sabalenka ready to boycott Grand Slams over prize money

## Tennis

ROME – World number one Aryna Sabalenka said yesterday she was ready to boycott the Grand Slam tournaments in order to have a greater share of the prize money.

"I feel like the show is on us. Without us there wouldn't be a tournament and there wouldn't be that entertainment," the four-time Grand Slam winner told a press conference at the Italian Open.

"I feel like definitely we deserve

to be paid more percentage.

"I think at some point we will boycott. I feel like that's going to be the only way to fight for our rights.

"We girls can easily get together and go for this because some of the things I feel like it's really unfair to the players. I think at some point it's going to get to this."

Last year almost all the leading players signed two letters to the four Grand Slam bosses demanding an increase in prize money, payments into a player welfare fund to

improve retirement and maternity benefits, as well as involvement in decisions that affected them.

The letters set a target of a 22-percent share in tournament revenue, which would bring the majors in line with the nine combined 1000-level events run by the ATP men's tour and the women's WTA tour.

However, Poland's Iga Swiatek, a four-time French Open singles champion, believes boycotting tournaments "is a bit extreme".

"I think the most important thing honestly is to have proper communication and discussions with the governing bodies so we have some space to talk and maybe negotiate," said Swiatek, who has also won Wimbledon and the US Open.

"Hopefully before Roland Garros there's going to be an opportunity to have these types of meetings and we'll see how they go."

On Monday, players said in a statement that an announcement

by the French Open last month of a 9.5-percent prize money rise was not good enough.

It said that last year Roland Garros generated 395 million euros (US\$463 million), a 14-percent increase.

However, the total purse went up by just 5.4 percent, reducing player share of revenue to 14.3 percent.

It estimated that this year's revenues would pass 400 million euros, leaving the player cut still below 15 percent. – AFP

## New Princess Diana documentary promises her own words

LOS ANGELES – A new documentary series based on hours of previously unreleased recordings made by Diana, the late Princess of Wales, is in the works, producers announced last week.

“Diana: The Unheard Truth,” set for release in 2027 – 30 years after her death in a Paris car crash – promises to tell the story of “the people’s princess” in her own words.

Using five hours of conversations between Diana and her close confidante, surgeon Dr James Colthurst, the tapes formed the basis of Andrew Morton’s explosive 1992 book “Diana: Her True Story.”

“This revelatory three-part docuseries restores authorship of one of the most scrutinised lives in modern history,” said a statement released on Thursday by Love Monday TV, the production company behind the venture.

It “will change public perception of Diana forever.”

“Through the tapes, we come to know a resilient, perceptive, and relatable young woman, finding herself in the brightest of global spotlights, and navigating the challenges with grace, self-awareness, and determination.”

Diana’s role in Britain’s storied monarchy is unparalleled.

The sumptuous 1981 wedding between Diana and the future King Charles III was a global extravaganza of good will.

But what followed quickly degenerated into a tabloid feeding frenzy as cracks appeared in the fairytale, with husband and wife seemingly seeking solace in the arms of others.

Diana’s shocking 1997 death in a Paris tunnel in a car speeding away from paparazzi sparked a public backlash in Britain that rocked the monarchy and the media.

The tapes, say producers, are a reminder that things could have turned out differently.

“We hear her infectious humour and twinkling laughter, as she reveals the truth about life inside the most famous family in the world,” the statement said.

“But most importantly we hear her dreams for a future that could have been; a new chapter in which Charles goes off into the sunset with [future queen] Camilla, leaving Diana free to carve her own path.”

The documentary series will also incorporate the perspectives of Diana’s inner circle, including advisers, close friends, her hairdresser, her bodyguard, and one-time royal press secretary Dickie Arbiter. –AFP

## Stars shine at Met Gala, fashion’s biggest night



Barbadian singer and actress Rihanna poses upon arrival for the 2026 Met Gala celebrating “Costume Art” at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York, on Monday. –AFP



British-US fashion editor Anna Wintour poses upon arrival for the 2026 Met Gala celebrating “Costume Art” at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York on Monday. –AFP



US singer-songwriter Beyoncé poses upon arrival for the 2026 Met Gala celebrating “Costume Art” at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York on Monday. –AFP

### Raphaëlle Peltier

NEW YORK – The brightest stars in Hollywood, music, sports and style – led by Beyoncé, Madonna and Nicole Kidman – hit the red carpet on Monday for the Met Gala, the Manhattan charity ball that doubles as fashion’s biggest night.

The A-listers were asked to dress for the theme “Fashion is Art,” which dovetails with the exhibit “Costume Art” at the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Costume Institute.

And while not everyone followed the guidelines to the letter, the gala – traditionally held on the first Monday in May – certainly delivered as one of the world’s top red carpets, with blinding star power.

Beyoncé, one of the event’s co-chairs who was making her first appearance in a decade, was one of the last to arrive, but she did not disappoint, stunning the crowd in a bejewelled skeleton gown topped with a dramatic feather coat and a headpiece.

Her rap mogul husband Jay-Z – in a tuxedo with tails – and daughter Blue Ivy Carter, in a white strapless gown and sparkling heels – joined her.

Earlier, the singer’s fellow co-chairs, tennis legend Venus Williams and Oscar-winning actress Nicole Kidman, kicked off the proceedings.

Kidman stunned in a shimmering red long-sleeved Chanel column dress with wide feather cuffs, while Williams glistened in a black crystal Swarovski gown with an elaborate neck plate.

From there, the stars kept on coming. Rock royalty Madonna, Cher and Stevie Nicks joined music’s new generation of stars

in Sabrina Carpenter, Doja Cat, and Tyla.

Rihanna and A\$AP Rocky were hours late, as per usual, making a grand entrance.

Bad Bunny, who is having a blockbuster 2026 with major Grammy wins and the Super Bowl halftime show under his belt, wore prosthetics and a white wig to explore how he would look as an old man, according to *Vogue*.

Rapper Doja Cat, one of several members of a gala “host committee,” wore a draped latex Saint Laurent gown with a demure neckline – but slit up to her waist.

Donatella Versace, Tom Ford, Stella McCartney, Anthony Vaccarello and Haider Ackermann were among the many fashion designers on hand for the evening.

Olympic gold medallists Alysa Liu and Eileen Gu – whose dress had a built-in bubble maker – led a strong contingent of athletes to the red carpet, along with NFL superstar Russell Wilson and several men’s and women’s basketball stars.

And actress Blake Lively made a surprise appearance at the gala, just hours after she settled a major court case over her film “It Ends with Us” with her co-star and director Justin Baldoni.

Of course, the entire evening was overseen by *Vogue*’s global editorial director Anna Wintour – the ultimate tastemaker in US fashion who has helmed the event for 30 years.

The gala is a fundraiser for the Met’s Costume Institute, and this year has raised a record US\$42 million (after US\$31 million in 2025), the museum’s CEO Max Hollein told reporters on Monday.

This year’s exhibit juxtaposes elegant fashion looks with paintings and sculpture: think a Saint Laurent design next to Van Gogh’s “Irisess”,

or a John Galliano gown for Maison Margiela paired with an antique statue.

“When I think about the show, if there’s one word to describe it, I suppose it would be equitability or equivalency, equivalency between artworks,” the Costume Institute’s curator Andrew Bolton told AFP.

“So there’s no hierarchy between sculpture, painting, fashion, photography and no hierarchy between bodies, between the classical body or the disabled body.”

### ‘Genuinely care’

This year’s function has drawn some controversy after Amazon boss Jeff Bezos and his wife Lauren Sanchez Bezos were announced as the lead sponsors and honorary co-chairs of the gala.

In the run-up to Monday, a campaign opposing the billionaire couple’s involvement cropped up in New York’s streets and subways, with some calling for a boycott of the event some see as a gross display of immense wealth.

At the gala, one person attempted to enter the secure area but was quickly handled by police and event security. Bezos did not walk the carpet.

Wintour said on Monday that the couple had “shown with this event that they genuinely, genuinely care about giving back.”

The Met Gala was first organised in 1948 and for decades was reserved for New York high society – until Wintour transformed the party into a high-profile catwalk for the rich and famous in the 1990s.

The “Costume Art” exhibit, which opens on Sunday at the venerable museum in Manhattan, will seek to explore the “dressed body” in artworks across the centuries. –AFP

(More photo on p.16)

## Yoko says Oh no to ‘John Lemon’ beer

BREST, France – The old saying about lemons and lemonade has borne fruit for a French craft brewery, which was ordered by Yoko Ono to stop making its “John Lemon” beer – and has now nearly sold out thanks to the publicity.

Aurelien Picard, owner of the Brasserie de l’Imprimerie brewery in the Brittany region, says he received notice in late March from lawyers for Ono to halt the use of the brand name or pay royalties for referencing her late husband, Beatles legend John Lennon.

“There were numbers like 100,000 euros {US\$117,000}, and between 150 and 1,000 euros per day in penalties if we didn’t do what they said,” Picard told AFP.

“Basically, they demanded we recall all our product and immediately stop using the brand.”

After some back-and-forth, the small brewery won permission to sell its remaining 5,000 bottles by July 1,

then halt production of the brand.

But the media attention generated by the dispute turned out to be great publicity: the brewery nearly sold out of John Lemon in a matter of days.

“It was crazy. I have fewer than 1,000 left,” said Picard. “It was kind of funny, amid our misfortune.”

The brewery, several of whose beers play on celebrity names, launched John Lemon five years ago, because it seemed “cool”, said Picard.

The company, located in the northwestern town of Bannalec, has two employees and sells between 50,000 and 80,000 bottles per year, mainly to liquor stores and restaurants within a 40-kilometre radius.

It is now looking for a new name for its flavourful blonde beer.

Picard thought of “Jaune Lemon” (“Yellow Lemon”) but Ono’s lawyers were sour on the idea, he said. –AFP

### World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 13°C~27°C	Manila 23°C~36°C	New York 12°C~21°C	Lisbon 11°C~21°C
Shanghai 15°C~27°C	Bangkok 27°C~35°C	London 7°C~14°C	Rio de Janeiro 19°C~28°C
Hong Kong 21°C~26°C	Tokyo 16°C~22°C	Frankfurt 10°C~20°C	Luanda 22°C~27°C
Taipei 19°C~27°C	Singapore 25°C~32°C	Vancouver 9°C~18°C	Maputo 16°C~29°C
Guangzhou 20°C~28°C	Kuala Lumpur 24°C~32°C	Paris 8°C~14°C	Dili 23°C~32°C
Nanjing 15°C~30°C	Jakarta 24°C~33°C	Moscow 12°C~23°C	São Tomé 25°C~34°C
Guilin 21°C~29°C	Seoul 12°C~24°C	Las Vegas 17°C~30°C	Praia 19°C~28°C
Xi’an 12°C~22°C	Sydney 11°C~22°C	Monte Carlo 11°C~19°C	Bissau 22°C~36°C



**Must buy new lens**

A monkey carries sunglasses in its mouth at a marketplace in New Delhi, India yesterday. – AFP

**Odd getup**

US rapper Cardi B arrives for the 2026 Met Gala celebrating "Costume Art" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York, on Monday. – AFP



**Bed of roses**

A boy is seen among rose petals in a rose garden in Dara-i-Noor district of Nangarhar province, Afghanistan, on Monday. Collecting rose petals when the flowers are in full bloom serves as a seasonal source of income for local residents in Dara-i-Noor. – Xinhua



**Rowdy guests**

A picture shows "Il Gesto" by French artist JR, on the facade of Ca' del Mosto, near Rialto bridge during the 61st Venice Art Biennale in Venice yesterday. The palazzo's facade becomes the surface for a large-scale temporary artistic installation inspired by Paolo Veronese "The Wedding at Cana" from the collection of the Musee du Louvre, originally created for the monastery of San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice. – AFP

**Mud cat**

A participant poses, caked in mud as they compete in the annual Maldon Mud Race in Maldon, east England on April 26. Originated in 1973, the race involves competitors racing around a course through the River Blackwater in Essex at low tide. – AFP



**Not so elegant**

A member of the Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo, known as 'The Trocks', performs during a dress run for the start of their 50th anniversary UK tour, at the Sadler's Wells Theatre in central London yesterday. – AFP