

Govt launches 3.3-pataca-per-litre subsidy for diesel users

Khalel Vallo

The local government announced in a press conference at Luso International Bank Building in Nam Van yesterday that it will provide a diesel subsidy of 3.3 patacas per litre for vehicles and all industrial and commercial premises where diesel-powered equipment is operated, starting Monday next week for a period of two months.

The two-month subsidy, the government said yesterday, aims to relieve the operational cost pressure on diesel-using businesses resulting from the surge in global oil product prices triggered by the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, thereby preventing the higher cost of diesel from being passed on to the prices of goods affecting residents' daily lives.

In Macau, diesel-powered motor vehicles are commercial vehicles as Macau does not import diesel-powered private cars.

The subsidy was announced by the Macau government's Cross-departmental Working Group for Fuel Monitoring during a press conference yesterday.

The working group consists of

officials from the Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSED), the Consumer Council (CC), the Environmental Protection Bureau (DSPA), the Statistics and Census Bureau (DSEC), and the Fire Services Bureau (CB).

Yesterday's press conference, chaired by DSED Director Yau Yun Wah, was held at the DSED headquarters in the Luso International Bank Building in Nam Van. The press conference was also attended by an official from each of the other four public entities.

During the press conference, Yau underlined that "in light of recent international geopolitical instability, which has caused continuous fluctuations in global oil product prices, the Macau government has consistently paid close attention to the impact of this situation on residents' daily lives and the business sector, closely monitoring the latest developments in the local fuel market".

Yau said that diesel, as the primary fuel for Macau's industrial and commercial businesses, constitutes an essential consumable for their operations, while the



Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSED) Director Yau Yun Wah addresses yesterday's press conference at Luso International Bank Building in Nam Van yesterday. – Photo: Khalel Vallo

operations of diesel-using businesses also directly affect residents' daily lives. Consequently, he said, the government decided to launch the two-month diesel subsidy scheme.

The subsidy will run between

00:00 a.m. on Monday next week and 11:59 p.m. on July 10.

All respective users will directly benefit from the 3.3-pataca-per-litre subsidy when purchasing diesel during the two-month period



without having to file an application, Yau noted.

Yau said that 11 million litres of diesel are used per month in Macau on average.

Yau said that there are currently about 8,600 diesel-powered vehicles in Macau, while there are 63 industrial and commercial premises where diesel-powered boilers are operated, and over 200 other industrial and commercial premises where other types of diesel-powered equipment are operated.

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WHO says now 5 confirmed cruise ship hantavirus cases



World Health Organisation (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus speaks during a virtual press conference on the hantavirus cluster linked to a cruise ship, at the WHO headquarters, in Geneva. – AFP

GENEVA – The World Health Organisation said yesterday there were now five confirmed hantavirus cases from the Atlantic cruise ship outbreak, with three more suspected – and warned further cases were possible.

Despite the three fatalities, the WHO insisted that the outbreak on the MV Hondius was not the start of an epidemic, or a repeat of the spread of COVID-19.

The UN health agency said it expected the outbreak to be limited – so long as public health measures are properly implemented.

"So far, eight cases have been reported, including three deaths. Five of the eight cases have been

confirmed as hantavirus and the other three are suspected," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said.

"The species of hantavirus involved in this case is the Andes virus, which is found in Latin America," he told a press conference in Geneva.

He stressed that "none of the remaining passengers or crew on the ship are currently symptomatic".

But given that the incubation period of the Andes virus – the only species of hantavirus that spreads between people – can be up to six weeks, he warned that "it's possible that more cases may be reported". (Earlier story on p.12, more on p.8) – AFP



People walk on a pedestrian overpass draped with smoking control posters in Hong Kong last Thursday. Visitors and residents alike will be fined up to HK\$50,000 and face a maximum 6 months in jail for carrying or using alternative smoking products in public in Hong Kong, according to the Hong Kong government. The alternative smoking products include electronic cigarettes, e-liquid and herbal cigarettes. The ban, which took effect last Thursday with no transition period, will be carried out on a "one strike you're out" basis, the government warned. – Xinhua

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The Macau Post Daily

China, US should strive for more practical achievements: Li Qiang

China is willing to work with the United States to implement the important consensus reached by the two heads of state and strive for more practical achievements between the two countries, Premier Li Qiang said yesterday. – Story on p. 7

100 years on Earth: Iconic naturalist Attenborough marks century

David Attenborough, a leading voice on climate change and biodiversity loss whose landmark documentaries transformed popular understanding of the natural world for a global audience, marks his 100th birthday today. – Story on p. 11

Portugal's last circus elephant becomes pioneer for European exiles

Portugal's last circus elephant, Julie, is to become one of the first residents of a retirement home for the pachyderms that could become a major draw as European nations clamp down on performing animals. – Story on p. 12

Water usage in Q1 rises 1.7 pct

Armindo Neves

Macau Water Executive Director Nacky Kuan Sio Peng yesterday announced during the water utility's routine meeting of its Customer Liaison Group at Macau Tower that Macau's water usage in the first quarter increased by 1.7 pct year-on-year.

Kuan said in a speech that water consumption in the first quarter reached 22 million cubic metres, driven mainly by the increase in visitors during the Spring Festival holiday and the commencement of operations at new hotel projects.

Macau Water expects an annual growth rate of around 3.0 percent for the whole year, Kuan said, adding

that household water consumption was forecast by her company to decrease slightly.

Kuan told reporters on the sidelines of the meeting that construction of a photovoltaic power generation system at the Seac Pai Van Water Treatment Plant has begun, with the installation of solar panels expected to be completed before the summer break. The system is projected to generate about 250,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity annually, accounting for 3 percent of the plant's total energy consumption, Kuan said. She also said that following the completion of the Seac Pai Van Reservoir expansion project, the



Macau Water Executive Director Nacky Kuan Sio Peng poses during yesterday's routine meeting at Macau Tower in Sai Van.



Marine and Water Bureau (DSAMA) Director Susana Wong Soi Man poses during yesterday's routine meeting.

— Photos: Armindo Neves

Govt launches 3.3-pataca-per-litre subsidy for diesel users

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In addition, Yau said, Macau's diesel users covered by the subsidy also includes about 400 vessels.

Yau said that the government expects to spend 80 million patacas on the subsidy scheme, underlining that the government believes that the 80-million-pataca subsidy would be sufficient to cover Macau's use of diesel for two months.

Yau underlined that diesel users will directly benefit from the 3.3-pataca-per-litre subsidy on the price actually paid after deducting the discount offered by the suppliers.

"During the implementation of the scheme, fuel suppliers must maintain their existing discount schemes for customers, meaning that the selling price shall be calculated by first deducting the discount offered by them, and then deducting the subsidy granted by the government from that discounted price," Yau said.

Furthermore, Yau said, the customer receipts must clearly indicate details such as the original price and the subsidy amount.

Petrol stations are also required to display information about the plan, Yau said, adding that the government will sign agreements with fuel companies outlining responsibilities and operational procedures. He underlined that companies must maintain accurate transaction records and submit

the respective financial reports to the government every 15 days, while the government will also commission independent auditors to review the scheme.

Yau pointed out that legal action will be taken in case of irregularities such as false sales records.

Meanwhile, Yau also said that in order to ensure proper implementation, the Cross-departmental Working Group for Fuel Monitoring will conduct inspections across Macau, checking equipment, fuel storage and sales documentation, while also briefing petrol station staff on details of the subsidy scheme.

Yau stressed that the subsidy is a temporary one and aimed at providing immediate relief to local businesses using diesel, while preventing rising diesel prices from being passed on to consumers.

Yau added that the bureau will continue monitoring global oil price trends and maintain close communication with the local fuel sector to ensure a stable supply and pricing, alongside strengthening transparency through regular public updates on fuel prices.

Yau underlined that Macau's fuel prices are based on those on the trading platform in Singapore, while in the Chinese mainland they are determined by the National Reform and Development Commission (NRDC). ■

local government plans to install a photovoltaic system above the water surface to supply electricity to the water treatment plant. In addition, the Coloane Reclaimed Water Station currently supplies around 1,500 cubic metres of reclaimed water per day to the Seac Pai Van public housing complex and the University of Macau.

Marine and Water Bureau (DSAMA) Director Susana Wong Soi Man told reporters that upon the completion of the Seac Pai Van Reservoir expansion project, Macau's total reservoir capacity will increase from the current 10-day water supply to a 12-day supply.

Wong also said that the authorities are planning the second phase of the Coloane Reclaimed Water Station and the design of a reclaimed water* station on the man-made island where the Macau checkpoint of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) is located, with both expected to be operational by 2030.

In 2030, Wong said, the supply of reclaimed water will be extended to Zone A. Discussions are also underway with the city's six integrated resort operators to introduce the use of reclaimed water for cooling purposes and other applications, Wong said, adding

that the medium-term target is for reclaimed water to account for 5.0 percent of total water consumption by 2030, and 10 percent by 2035. ■

*Reclaimed water (also known as recycled water or water reuse) is former wastewater that has been treated to remove solids and certain impurities. Instead of being discharged into natural water bodies like rivers or oceans, it is reused for a variety of beneficial purposes. The level of treatment required depends on the intended "end use," ranging from basic irrigation to high-grade industrial processes or even indirect potable reuse. — Gemini

Semi-trailer crashes into flower bed after spare tyre comes loose

Armindo Neves

A spokesman for the Public Security Police (PSP) confirmed to the *Post* yesterday evening that a semi-trailer lost control and crashed into a flower bed after its spare tyre became detached.

At around midday yesterday, PSP officers received a report of an accident on Estrada de Seac Pai Van (石排灣馬路) in Coloane.

Upon arriving at the scene, officers found the semi-trailer in the middle of a roadside flower bed,



This image posted on Facebook early yesterday afternoon shows a spare tyre on the ground and a semi-trailer in the middle of a roadside flowerbed on Estrada de Seac Pai Van in Coloane. The *Post* cannot vouch for the authenticity of the image.

with several sections of iron railing damaged. The spokesman added that the driver passed a breathalyser test.

The driver was identified as a local resident in his forties.

Initial investigations revealed that the accident occurred at about noon. The semi-trailer reportedly lost control after the spare tyre came loose and the vehicle ran over it, forcing the vehicle into the flower bed.

Under Article 30, Paragraph 1 of Macau's Road Traffic Law, drivers must regulate their speed according to the characteristics and condition of the road, the vehicle, the load, weather conditions, and traffic intensity. Drivers must be able to stop safely within the visible space ahead and avoid foreseeable obstacles. The driver has been fined 300 patacas.

Scooter crosses 2 lanes before crashing into bus

Meanwhile, a spokeswoman for Transmac confirmed to the *Post* yesterday evening that a scooter crossed two lanes before crashing into a bus at Praça de Ferreira do Amaral (亞馬喇前地) yesterday afternoon.

According to the spokeswoman, at 2:48 p.m., the bus was travelling normally when it was struck by a motorcycle crossing two lanes from the right. The front right side of the bus was damaged, though no passengers were injured.

A PSP spokesman further confirmed by phone that the rider is a local woman in her fifties who passed the breathalyser test. The rider was taken to Kiang Wu Hospital and fined for changing lanes carelessly, the spokesman said. ■



A scooter and a rider lie next to a Transmac bus at Praça de Ferreira do Amaral (亞馬喇前地) yesterday afternoon. — Photo courtesy of Macau Daily News

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NORTHEASTERLIES.
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80% AND 98%.



23°C~27°C

Source: SMG

LRT to allow bikes at weekends from tomorrow

Tony Wong

LRT (Light Rapid Transit) passengers can take bicycles on board every weekend starting tomorrow, provided they meet specific requirements, the government-owned operator announced yesterday.

The new measure will be implemented on a trial basis, running until August 30. After the measure's trial implementation, the LRT operator will review the rules governing the measure for possible improvements before deciding whether to roll out it on a permanent basis.

The measure was announced in a joint statement by the LRT operator, Macau Light Rapid Transit Corporation Limited (MLM), and the Transport Bureau (DSAT) yesterday.

According to the statement, the weekend measure will apply to both conventional and folding bikes. Before entering the LRT ticket gates, the bicycles must be folded or have one wheel removed, with the length not exceeding 180 centimetres after being folded or having one wheel removed, the statement said.

Passengers can directly take their bicycle on board if its original length does not exceed 130 centimetres, without having to fold it or remove the wheel, the statement said.

Existing rules remain in place from Monday to Friday, meaning passengers cannot carry items exceeding 170 cm in combined length, width, and height. Additionally, no single side may exceed 130 cm.

Following a review of travel patterns, according to the statement, the LRT operator is trialling the measure to better accommodate cyclists without compromising the comfort of other passengers.

According to the statement, LRT passengers carrying a bicycle are required to board the second carriage of a two-carriage train, and board the second or fourth carriage of a four-carriage train.

The operator stressed that bicycles must be positioned so they do not obstruct aisles. If carriages are crowded, cyclists are advised to wait for the next train to ensure a safe and orderly environment. ■

New association aims to boost ties with Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking markets: Rui Pedro Cunha

Armindo Neves

The newly founded Macao Portuguese- and Spanish-Speaking Countries Entrepreneurs Association hosted its first general meeting at Macau Tower in Sai Van yesterday.

According to a statement released during the meeting, yesterday also marked the association's formal establishment.

Rui Pedro Cunha, the founding president of the association, noted in a speech that Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking countries span four continents, with a combined population of over 800 million, representing enormous market potential. Leveraging its historical ties, cultural connectivity, and the advantages of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle, Macau is well-positioned as an ideal platform linking these markets with the Chinese mainland, he said. The association will bring together the strength of Macau's business community to help Macau serve as an economic and trade bridge between China and Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking countries, according to Cunha.

Alan Ho Hoi Ming, head of the association's supervisory board, said in a speech that the association will focus on areas such as improving member services, facilitating high-level resource connections, and offering policy recommendations. It will promote the deep integration of "industry, academia,



Macao Portuguese- and Spanish-Speaking Countries Entrepreneurs Association President Rui Pedro Cunha (centre), Chairman Jorge Valente (right) and Ho Hoi Ming, head of the association's supervisory board, pose during yesterday's general meeting at Macau Tower in Sai Van.

- Photo courtesy of the association

research, and application" and organise businesses to "go global as a coordinated group" to expand cross-border economic and trade exchanges and two-way investment.

At the same time, Ho said, the association will organise a number of international economic and trade branding events related to China and Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking countries, in order to enhance Macau's international influence.

The association's chairman, Jorge Valente, said in a speech that the association's membership, which

currently exceeds 80 individuals, spans diverse fields including law, finance, conventions and exhibitions, technology, and cross-border trade.

The association has four names – in Chinese, Portuguese, Spanish, and English.

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai visited Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and Belgium last month to promote Macau's role as a business-service hub for economic, commercial and cultural ties between China and the world's nine Portuguese-speaking and 20 Spanish-speaking countries and territories. ■

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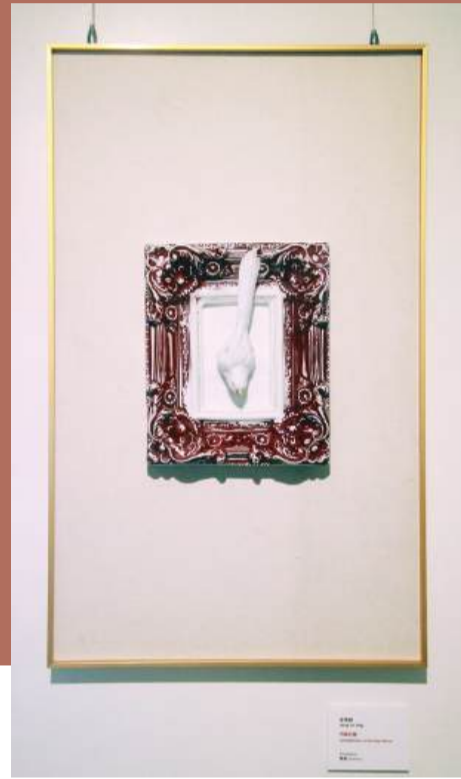
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FRC ink & sculpture exhibition features experimental works

Khalel Vallo

A solo exhibition by local artist Leong Sin Teng opened on Tuesday at the Rui Cunha Foundation (FRC) gallery, showcasing experimental works that blend ink, sculpture, and mixed media.

Titled “Sculpted Impressions: The Harmony of Ink and Form”, the exhibition features 28 works that explore new possibilities in sculptural creation beyond traditional three-dimensional forms, according to the exhibition’s information board.

The exhibition is co-organised by FRC, the Macau Youth Art Association and the Macau Artist Society. Leong, an associate professor at the Guangzhou College of Commerce’s School of Art and Design, incorporates diverse materials and techniques in her works, including glass manipulation, soft pigmented watercolours, electric light, transparency and shadow.

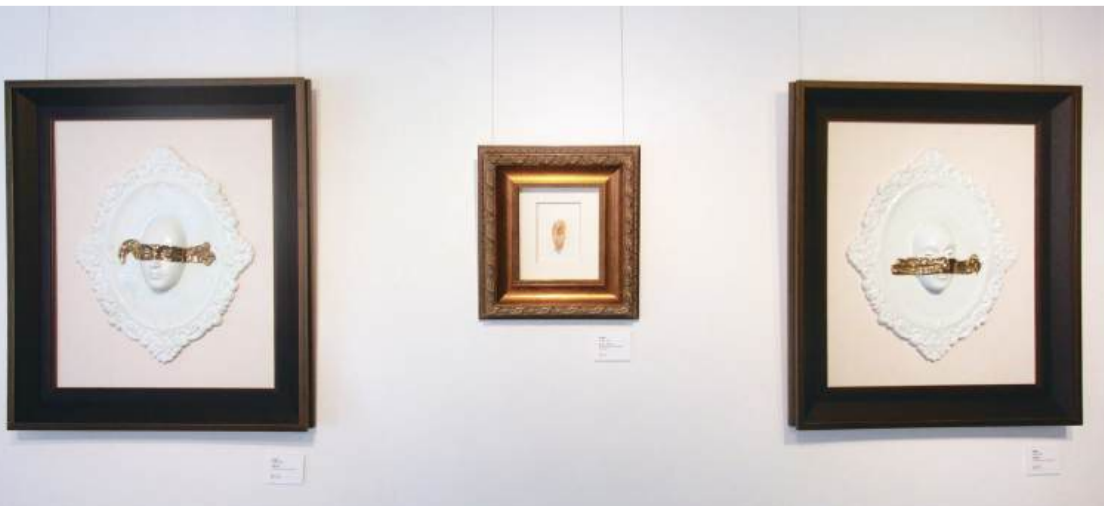
Her pieces aim to challenge conventional perceptions of sculpture by integrating visual and sensory elements. According to Leong’s friend and curator Wong Ka Long, she uses materials such as ceramics, ink, glass and bronze not as fixed mediums but as carriers of light, shadow and expression, according to a statement on the FRC website. He noted that her works balance clarity and ambiguity, offering what he described as a “power of haziness” that allows viewers to engage with both tangible and intangible qualities.

The exhibition also draws on traditional Chinese imagery, such as “flowers in the mirror, Moon on the water”, reinterpreting it through a contemporary and feminine perspective. Wong said, according to the FRC website, that the works extend this idea to explore “genuine emotions beneath illusory superficiality”, while highlighting the fusion of Eastern cultural elements with Western stylistic influences.

Born in Macau, Leong holds degrees from the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts and the City University of Macau. Her works have been collected by institutions including Yuexiu Park in Guangzhou and the Art Museum of the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts. Leong has also participated in regional talent development programmes and holds various roles in local arts organisations.

Exhibitiongoers can visit the gallery at 749 Avenida da Praia Grande, Luen Pong Building; it is open Monday to Friday from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. and 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. on Saturdays. With free admission, the exhibition runs through May 16.

Photos: Khalel Vallo



May Day holiday trips, spending rise year on year

BEIJING – China's cultural and tourism market sustained stable expansion during the 2026 May Day holiday, with domestic trips and total spending both registering year-on-year growth, according to official data released yesterday.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism announced that a total of 325 million domestic trips were made across the country during the May 1-5 period, representing a 3.6-percent increase from the same period last year.

Domestic tourism expenditure reached 185.49 billion yuan, up 2.9 percent year on year, the ministry said, citing calculations from its data center.

Public cultural institutions across the country organized around 49,400 cultural events during this holiday, attracting approximately 88 million visits, the ministry noted.

Nighttime cultural and tourism consumption remained robust, with national-level nighttime cultural and tourism consumption clusters receiving more than 80.41 million visits, an increase of 6.44 percent year on year.



Tourists watch a performance at the Wujiao Acrobatics World theme park in Wujiao County of Cangzhou City, Hebei Province, on May Day. China's cultural and tourism market sustained stable expansion during the 2026 May Day holiday, with domestic trips and total spending both registering year-on-year growth, according to official data released yesterday.

– Xinhua

Additionally, China saw strong growth in its performance market during the holiday period. Roughly 32,000 commercial performances, excluding entertainment venue shows, were staged nationwide, generating box office revenue of 2.48 billion yuan, up 14.66 percent year on year.

These favorable holiday figures underscored the growing importance of the cultural and tourism sector in China's broader economic landscape.

Official data previously released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) revealed that the added value

of the country's culture-related industries accounted for 4.61 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), while tourism-related industries contributed 4.35 percent.

This shift reflects deeper structural changes in the Chinese economy, where service consumption is playing an increasingly prominent role in driving domestic demand and economic growth.

Analysts say Chinese consumers are increasingly prioritizing experiences over material ownership, with travel, immersive cultural activities and heritage-themed dining becoming popular lifestyle choices.

The momentum has continued into 2026. During the Spring Festival holiday earlier this year, domestic trips reached 596 million and tourism spending exceeded 800 billion yuan, both record highs. In the first quarter, revenue of major cultural enterprises rose 6.4 percent year on year to more than 3.5 trillion yuan.

The cultural tourism sector is also extending beyond traditional scenic attractions into rural areas and

local communities. Heritage-themed tourism gained popularity during the May Day holiday, while intangible cultural heritage workshops and rural tourism projects helped create jobs and increase incomes.

China's latest policy blueprint for the 2026-2030 period calls for faster development of cultural industries and stronger growth in cultural tourism, while this year's government work report emphasized high-quality development of integrated sectors combining culture, tourism, sports and commerce.

China's international tourism appeal has also continued to rise. In 2025, inbound tourist visits exceeded 150 million, up over 17 percent year on year, while inbound tourism spending surpassed 130 billion US dollars, an increase of nearly 40 percent.

During this May Day holiday, trips by foreign nationals to and from China rose to 1.26 million, a 12.5-percent increase from a year earlier. Among those entering China, 436,000 came visa-free, up 14.7 percent.

– Xinhua

Fresh African goods hit Chinese market under new zero-tariff policy

BEIJING – Boosted by China's new zero-tariff policy for African countries with diplomatic ties, a growing wave of African specialty products hit the Chinese market over the just-concluded May Day holiday, unlocking fresh opportunities for robust bilateral trade.

At the stroke of midnight on May 1, 24 tonnes of apples from South Africa were swiftly cleared by customs officers in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, becoming the first batch of imports entering the country after it began implementing an expanded zero-tariff treatment for all 53 African countries with which it has diplomatic relations.

The latest policy expansion came as China – Africa's largest trading partner for 17 consecutive years – had already scrapped tariffs on 100 percent of tariff lines for imports from 33 least developed countries (LDCs) with diplomatic ties on the continent since December 1, 2024.

For this new batch of South African apples bound for markets across China, the tariff rate plunged from 10 percent to zero, further strengthening their competitiveness in the Chinese market.

Likewise, in Guangzhou, the province's capital, customs officers cleared a shipment of over 6,900 kilograms of Kenyan fresh avocados just after midnight on May 1. By the end of the day, these avocados were on consumers' tables in the Greater Bay Area in south China.

Before the policy change, Kenyan fresh avocados faced a 7-percent tariff. "Zero tariffs mean better competitiveness and lower costs, a real gain for us and for Chinese consumers," said Yuan Chengjie, a sales manager of Shenzhen Ouheng Import & Export Co., Ltd., adding that the nearly

year-round availability of Kenyan fresh avocados makes them a firm favorite among Chinese shoppers.

In addition to South African apples and Kenyan avocados, Africa has been exporting an astonishing variety of products to China, ranging from Beninese pineapples, Rwandan dried chilies, Malagasy mutton, Ghanaian black soap and Tunisian rosemary to Nigerian cassia seeds.

Official data underscores this robust momentum. In 2025, China's trade with these 53 African countries hit a record high of US\$348.08 billion. In the first quarter of 2026, the figure reached US\$92.16 billion, a year-on-year surge of 26.8 percent.

As the new zero-tariff policy covers not only the least developed African nations but also stronger African economies such as South Africa, Egypt, Nigeria and Algeria, more quality local goods are expected to reach Chinese households.

Chinese import companies are already pivoting to seize the opportunity.

"The full zero-tariff coverage of African coffee beans has hugely expanded our sourcing options and given us a powerful cost advantage for supply-chain optimization," said Wang Xinguo, general manager of Ningbo Beiyuan Co., Ltd., a domestic coffee bean importer.

Wang added that the company, encouraged by the zero-tariff policy, aims to boost its annual green bean imports from Africa by 15-20 percent to 1,200 tonnes this year.

Bringing in more products tax-free is only half the story. China has unveiled a string of supportive measures to fully tap into the policy's dividends.

Zhang Panjun, customs manager of a Zhejiang-based import-export firm in east China, recalled that their imported Egyptian fresh oranges

had arrived at Shanghai Waigaoqiao Port while the certificate of origin was still being processed.

For most importers, without a valid certificate of origin, goods may be detained, thus blocking customs declaration and disrupting follow-up marketing. "Fresh fruits are highly time-sensitive, so I was very worried," said Zhang.

To help Zhang's company enjoy zero-tariff benefits immediately and avoid demurrage, storage fees and spoilage, customs at the port guided the company to apply for a supplementary declaration plus duty security, releasing the Egyptian oranges first and completing the formalities once the certificate was ready.

Even more help is on the way. In line with this policy, the General Administration of Customs (GAC) has further optimized quarantine access procedures, issued corresponding rules of origin for zero-tariff treatment of African goods, and upgraded "green channel" facilitation measures for African agricultural and food products, while actively cooperating with African countries in areas like mutual recognition of Authorized Economic Operators.

Guo Xueyan, an official with the GAC, noted that customs authorities have revised regulations on the registration of overseas food production enterprises, scheduled to take effect on June 1, adding that the move will further facilitate the export of African farm and food products to China.

The zero-tariff policy marks a major milestone in upgrading China-African economic cooperation, said Guo, who expects a more prosperous trade relationship between the two sides thanks to opportunities stemming from China's vast market.

– Xinhua

Chinese cultural empowerment an inspiration for development

Commentary

BEIJING – As the world is beset by challenges marked by development and governance deficits, China's efforts to harness cultural strength to bolster economic and social development offer valuable insights for advancing more inclusive, resilient and people-centered development models.

As China presses ahead with its drive for socialist modernization, culture stands as a fulcrum for high-quality development, an essential underpinning for meeting the people's aspiration for a better life, and a source of strength to surmount risks and challenges.

While China's economy is increasingly focused on high-quality development, culture is deeply integrated into every link and field of economic and social development, fostering new economic highlights, unleashing consumption vitality and improving social governance, according to a report, "The Theory of Cultural Empowerment: China's Cultural Consciousness in Marching Toward High-Quality Development," released by Xinhua Institute yesterday.

The spirit of innovation is an inherent virtue in China's fine traditional culture. Today, technological innovation has become a key driver of China's high-quality development. Moreover, the principle of "technology for good" ensures that technological applications genuinely enhance people's well-being and promote social progress.

The vitality of cultural consumption is being unleashed as new immersive and interactive consumption formats continue to emerge. These include immersive exhibitions, digital museums, and

artificial intelligence cultural products. Through creative transformation and innovative development of fine traditional culture, China is effectively converting its cultural resource advantages into momentum for industrial development.

China treats culture as a key pillar of effective governance. By strengthening cultural identity, it consolidates the foundations of social harmony in an era of dynamic interplay of diverse cultures. Drawing wisdom from fine traditions, China transforms cultural strength into governance efficiency.

Cultural values endow the Chinese people with the confidence and resolve to pursue development. Cultural confidence is the most fundamental, profound and enduring driving force for development. This strength enables the Chinese people to build fulfilling lives through dedication and hard work.

Importantly, empowering development with culture cannot be achieved without sound approaches. Such approaches include upholding value guidance, which ensures that economic and social development always advances in the right direction, and putting people's needs for a better life. They also include upholding truth, staying on the right path, and being courageous in breaking new ground.

A country will thrive only if its culture thrives, and a nation will be strong only if its culture is strong. Countries around the world should leverage their unique cultural resources in light of their national conditions, thereby consolidating the deep foundation and spiritual confidence for national development.

– Xinhua

China urges Japan to do soul-searching, create necessary conditions for normal exchanges

BEIJING – A foreign ministry spokesperson said yesterday the root cause of the current severe difficulties besetting China-Japan relations lies in the erroneous remarks regarding Taiwan made by Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, urging Japan to do soul-searching and create necessary conditions for normal exchanges.

Spokesperson Lin Jian made the remarks at a daily press briefing in response to a query, as six months have passed since Takaichi publicly claimed that a Taiwan contingency could constitute a “survival-threatening situation” for Japan, implying possible military involvement.

Referring to the serious difficulties in bilateral relations,

Lin noted the responsibility rests solely with the Japanese side. Genuine exchange and dialogue is only possible when there is respect and consensus is honored.

If the Japanese side truly hopes to improve relations with China, it should abide by the four political documents between the two countries and the commitments it made to China, retract its erroneous remarks, and safeguard the political foundation for bilateral relations with concrete actions, said Lin.

“We urge the Japanese authorities to face up to the root cause of the issue, do soul-searching, rectify their wrongdoings, and create necessary conditions for normal exchanges between China and Japan,” Lin added. – *Xinhua*

China slams EU’s discriminatory restrictions on Chinese inverters

BEIJING – China has firmly rejected the European Union’s (EU) groundless designation of China as a so-called “high-risk country” and its decision to restrict funding support for projects using Chinese inverters, devices that convert solar panels’ direct current output into alternating current for use in homes and industrial facilities, the Ministry of Commerce (MOC) said yesterday.

A spokesperson for the ministry made the remarks in response to media reports that EU officials had stated the bloc would prohibit funding support for projects using inverters from “high-risk countries” such as China.

“Without any concrete evidence, the EU has, for the first time, designated China as a ‘high-risk country’ and, on that basis, banned funding for projects using Chinese inverters,” the spokesperson said. “This constitutes an act of stigmatization against China and subjects Chinese products to unfair and discriminatory treatment. China rejects and firmly opposes this move.”

The spokesperson further noted that labeling China as a “high-risk country” will undermine mutual

trust between China and Europe, disrupt bilateral economic and trade cooperation, and threaten the stability of China-EU and global industrial and supply chains. “In the long term, it risks decoupling and disrupting supply chains,” the spokesperson added.

According to the spokesperson, the EU’s forced measures to exclude Chinese products violate market principles and fair competition. “These actions not only harm the interests of Chinese companies but will also backfire on the EU itself, affecting its green transition and energy security.”

China urges the EU to immediately cease the stigmatizing practice of listing China as a “high-risk country” and to withdraw the unfair, discriminatory measures against Chinese products, the spokesperson said, adding that China will closely monitor and carefully assess the impact of EU policies on the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese enterprises, as well as on China-EU industrial and supply chains.

Necessary actions will be taken to protect the lawful rights and interests of Chinese companies, according to the spokesperson. – *Xinhua*

China, US should strive for more practical achievements: Li Qiang



Premier Li Qiang (center, right) meets with a visiting delegation of US senators led by Steve Daines (center, left) at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. – *Xinhua*

BEIJING – China is willing to work with the United States to implement the important consensus reached by the two heads of state, enhance dialogue and communication, create a favorable atmosphere for exchanges at all levels and cooperation in various fields, and strive for more practical achievements between the two countries, Premier Li Qiang said yesterday.

Li made the remarks when meeting with a visiting delegation of US senators led by Steve Daines in Beijing.

Noting that President Xi Jinping and President Donald Trump had a phone call this February, which

has set new strategic guidance on promoting the development of the bilateral relations, Li said that the Chinese side is willing to work with the United States to continuously enhance the well-being of the two peoples, and inject certainty and positive energy into the world.

Li pointed out that experience has repeatedly shown that adhering to mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation is the right way for the two major countries to get along with each other.

It is hoped that the US side will work with China in the same direction, pursue dialogue and mutually beneficial cooperation

rather than confrontation and zero-sum competition, and maintain stable and predictable China-US economic and trade relations, said Li, adding that this is in line with the fundamental interests of both sides.

Noting the Taiwan question concerns China’s core interests, and is the first and foremost red line that must not be crossed in China-US relations, Li said that it is hoped that the US Congress will proceed from the overall interests of friendly cooperation between the two countries, view and handle China-related issues with caution, and play an active role in the stable, sound and sustainable development of China-US relations. – *Xinhua*

2 former Chinese defense ministers handed death sentence with reprieve for graft

BEIJING – Two former Chinese defense ministers, Wei Fenghe and Li Shangfu, were both sentenced to death with a two-year reprieve over graft charges yesterday.

Their sentences were separately handed down by the country’s military court.

Both Wei and Li were also

former members of the Central Military Commission (CMC) and former state councilors.

According to the court rulings, Wei was convicted of the crime of accepting bribes, and Li was convicted of crimes of both accepting and offering bribes.

They were also stripped of their

political rights for life, and all of their personal property will be confiscated.

The court rulings said that no further commutation or parole will be allowed after their penalties are commuted to life imprisonment in accordance with the law upon the expiration of the two-year reprieve period. – *Xinhua*

China Red Cross aids over 16,000 seriously ill children in past year

BEIJING – The Red Cross Society of China (RCSC) helped more than 16,000 seriously ill children over the past year, including financial support for over 7,000 young leukemia patients and more than 5,000 children living with congenital heart disease, it announced at a press briefing yesterday.

The RCSC also carried out congenital heart disease screening in 12 provincial-level regions

across the country, reaching a total of 150,000 children, said Bian Xiao, RCSC vice president.

RCSC branches at all levels have established service teams for voluntary blood donation with over 200,000 members. Meanwhile, the China Marrow Donor Program added 170,000 new donor samples to its database.

Today marks the 79th World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day.

– *Xinhua*

Central authorities issue measures to assess ‘Beautiful China’ construction progress

BEIJING – The central authorities have unveiled assessment measures for the building of a Beautiful China, aiming to promote green and low-carbon development and achieve overall improvement in ecological and environmental quality, according to an official document made public recently.

The document, jointly issued by the General Office of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council, says the

assessment of annual major targets will cover air quality, water and marine ecological environments, the soil environment, solid waste pollution prevention and control, and ecological quality.

The document also specifies annual key tasks for assessment, including the green and low-carbon transformation of development models, pollution control, efforts to enhance the diversity, stability and sustainability of ecosystems, and ecological and environmental security.

The assessment will also cover the fulfillment of responsibilities, the use of fiscal funds for ecological and environmental protection, and public satisfaction with local progress in Beautiful China construction and improvements in ecological and environmental quality.

Assessment results will be graded on a 100-point scale and classified into four categories, namely excellent, good, qualified and unqualified, the document notes.

– *Xinhua*

Wars in Middle East, backyard loom over ASEAN summit

CEBU – Leaders of the ASEAN states are descending on the central Philippines for what President Ferdinand Marcos has pledged will be a “bare bones” summit focused on economic issues tied to the Middle East war.

While supply chain woes sparked by the US-Israeli attack on Iran may dominate talks, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), now 11 strong with the addition of Timor-Leste, has a still-raging civil war in its own backyard.

Here are a few of the topics the region’s leaders may discuss this week.

Strait talk

Dwindling fuel supplies, soaring food costs and the safety of migrant workers near the Middle East conflict zone will be the most pressing issues at the summit, Marcos said in March, days after declaring a national energy emergency.

“What we really need at this time is for leaders to talk about... how can we help each other,” he said, batting down rumours the summit could be called off entirely amid the crisis.

But while ASEAN has issued broad statements about energy cooperation, it has no existing mechanisms that mandate action.

The bloc’s decades-old Petroleum Security Agreement, for instance, a fuel-sharing scheme aimed at ensuring energy stability, has never been invoked and is purely voluntary.

The Philippines said Wednesday it had endorsed a group “response to the crisis” in the Middle East it hoped to issue this week, without providing details.

That document would likely include a call to reopen the Strait of Hormuz and ensure freedom of movement in other critical sea lanes, according to an ASEAN diplomat



Myanmar’s Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs U Hau Khan Sum (from left to right), Malaysia’s Foreign Minister Mohamad Hasan, Thailand’s Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuanketkeow, East Timor’s Foreign Minister Bendito dos Santos Freitas, Vietnam’s Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Dang Hoang Giang, Philippine’s Foreign Secretary Theresa Lazaro, Singapore’s Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan, Brunei’s Second Foreign Minister Erywan Pehin Yusof, Cambodia’s Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn, Indonesia’s Foreign Minister Sugiono, Lao’s Foreign Minister Thongsavanh Phomvihane, and ASEAN Secretary General Kao Kim Hourn hold hands during a group photo session at the ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ Meeting at the Mactan Expo in Cebu yesterday. — AFP

who had seen an early draft and spoke to AFP on condition of anonymity.

‘Normal relations’

ASEAN member state Myanmar has been formally excluded from summits like the one in Cebu since its military junta snatched power in a 2021 coup that triggered a bloody civil war and crackdown on dissent.

Whether or not a recent election that installed junta leader Min Aung Hlaing as president - or the decision to move democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi from prison to house arrest - will inch it closer to a return to the fold is unclear.

Min Aung Hlaing said his government would “work to restore normal relations” with ASEAN after he was sworn in as president last month, but the bloc - which has worked fruitlessly to restore peace for years - appears far from a consensus.

Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuanketkeow told AFP in January that Bangkok had proposed a “calibrated engagement” with the new government, saying he hoped the election could be the “start of the transition”.

“A good number” of the bloc’s members hold similarly “pragmatic” views, Philippines Foreign Minister Theresa Lazaro said at that month’s ASEAN summit.

But at least a few countries are believed to be setting the bar higher.

The ASEAN diplomat who spoke to AFP said the bloc had “only one card” to play with Myanmar: full diplomatic recognition.

On Wednesday, the Philippines praised Myanmar’s decision to move Suu Kyi to house arrest while asking that a special envoy be granted “brief access” to the 80-year-old. — AFP

Indonesian flood victims file lawsuit over slow reconstruction

JAKARTA – Victims of deadly floods and landslides that struck Indonesia’s Sumatra island last year filed a lawsuit yesterday demanding the government declare a national disaster to speed up reconstruction, plaintiffs’ lawyer told AFP.

Devastating floods and landslides killed more than 1,200 people, according to a government tally, when they struck swathes of Sumatra in November in one of the worst disasters to hit the archipelago since a 2004 tsunami.

The government has pointed to the

role forest loss played in the disaster and moved to revoke the permits of more than two dozen companies alleged to have committed violations.

But plaintiffs want the government to declare a national disaster in provinces affected, to help local governments speed up post-disaster reconstruction, Muhammad Qodrat, a lawyer for the plaintiffs, told AFP.

Yesterday, seven residents of the North Sumatra, Aceh and West Sumatra provinces filed a suit in the Jakarta state administrative court, Qodrat said.

“On the ground, the rehabilitation and reconstruction process is progressing very slowly. Many people have yet to receive temporary or permanent housing,” the lawyer said.

“That is why (we) demand this be declared a national disaster, along with funding and a working mechanism directly overseen by the central government.”

Qodrat said the plaintiffs are also seeking an environmental audit of mining and plantation concessions and of companies found to have violated regulations. — AFP

7 Filipinos injured in drone attack on ship in Strait of Hormuz

MANILA – Seven Filipino seafarers were injured after a drone attack struck the container ship “San Antonio” in the Strait of Hormuz on Tuesday, the Philippines’ Department of Migrant Workers said yesterday.

In a statement, Migrant Workers Secretary Hans Leo Cacdac said the seven Filipinos were among the

crew members hurt when a drone hit the vessel.

Cacdac said the Filipino crew members survived the attack and are currently receiving treatment in an undisclosed hospital in the region for burns and gas inhalation caused by the explosion triggered by the drone strike.

Of the seven injured Filipino seafarers, Cacdac said four sustained minor injuries while three remain under intensive care.

The incident comes amid heightened tensions in the Middle East, particularly around the Strait of Hormuz, a vital global shipping route. (More on Middle East war on p.10) — Xinhua

2 Singapore residents isolated, awaiting hantavirus test results

SINGAPORE – Two Singapore residents who had been on board a hantavirus-hit cruise ship have been isolated as they await test results for the rare respiratory disease, Singapore’s Communicable Diseases Agency (CDA) said yesterday.

Two men aged 65 and 67 had been on the ship and also the same flight as a confirmed hantavirus case from St Helena to Johannesburg on April 25, the CDA said.

Both arrived in Singapore in early May and have been isolated and are being monitored at Singapore’s National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID). The confirmed case did not travel to the city-state and died in South Africa.

“Two Singapore residents had been on board the cruise ship MV Hondius, which has reported an outbreak of Andes hantavirus. Both individuals have been isolated at the National Centre for Infectious Diseases, where they are being tested for hantavirus,” a CDA statement said.

“Their test results are pending. One has a runny nose but is otherwise well, and the other is asymptomatic. The risk to the general public in Singapore is currently low.”

If the pair test negative for hantavirus “they will be quarantined for 30 days from the date of last exposure”, CDA said, adding that “testing will be conducted again before release from quarantine”.

If they test positive they will remain hospitalised for monitoring and treatment, and “contact tracing will be conducted to identify persons who have been exposed during the infectious period, and close contacts will be quarantined”, the CDA said.

The MV Hondius has been at the centre of an international health scare since Saturday, when the UN’s health agency was informed that three passengers had died and the suspected cause was hantavirus.

Eight cases, including three deaths, had been linked to the cluster on the cruise ship by Wednesday, according to CDA.

The rare disease is usually spread from infected rodents, typically through urine, droppings and saliva.

However, experts have confirmed that the version of the virus detected aboard the Hondius is a rare strain that can be transmitted between humans.

— AFP

8 suspected ISIS-linked militants arrested in Indonesia

JAKARTA – Indonesia’s counterterrorism squad Densus 88 has arrested eight suspected members of the homegrown extremist group Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), which is affiliated with the Islamic State group, in Central Sulawesi province, police said.

The arrests took place between 1:30 a.m. and 3:30 a.m. local time on Wednesday in Poso regency and Parigi Moutong regency, Densus 88 spokesperson Mayndra Eka Wardhana said in a statement.

He said preliminary investigations indicated that the suspects have been involved in spreading terrorist propaganda

online, including images, writings, and videos promoting radical ideologies, and were also suspected of involvement in other terrorist activities.

“The operation is part of ongoing efforts to prevent radicalism and safeguard national security,” he said, adding that authorities are continuing to investigate the suspects.

JAD has been linked to several attacks across Indonesia, including the 2021 cathedral bombing in Makassar and the 2018 church bombings in East Java. The group was declared illegal in 2018.

— Xinhua



Malaysia’s Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) chief commissioner Azam Baki (centre) speaks in front of artworks by Maurice Utrillo, (left to right) Pablo Picasso, Joan Miro and Balthus linked to 1MDB asset recovery during a press conference at the MACC headquarters in Putrajaya, Malaysia on Wednesday. — AFP

Sri Lanka arrests more than 260 foreigners over cybercams

COLOMBO – Sri Lankan authorities arrested 30 Chinese and Vietnamese nationals yesterday in the latest crackdown on cybercams, raising the number detained since the weekend to 261, police said.

The latest arrests were made in Werahera, a suburb of the capital, police said, adding that 74 Vietnamese nationals arrested elsewhere in the capital on Wednesday were remanded in custody until May 14.

Crime groups around the world have carried out online scams, defrauding victims of tens of billions of dollars annually, often through cryptocurrency fraud and fake romantic relationships.

In Sri Lanka, authorities cracked down on two suspected cybercam centres on Sunday, arresting a total of 157 people.

“They had entered the country on tourist visas and were illegally employed, while some had overstayed their visas,” police spokesman Frederick Wootler said.

A Colombo magistrate ordered a forensic examination of computers and mobile phones seized from the alleged scam centre in Colombo’s

Kollupitiya area, where the 74 Vietnamese nationals were arrested on Wednesday.

The suspects were aged between 19 and 39, police said, adding that most had overstayed their visas.

The arrests came a month after 152 foreign nationals, mostly Chinese, were detained for allegedly running a cybercam operation from a hotel in the island’s northwest.

Immigration authorities arrested 135 Chinese men and women in March for allegedly operating a similar scam. They have since been deported.

Beijing’s embassy in Colombo said at the time that it was working closely with local authorities to prevent Chinese nationals from engaging in scam operations in Sri Lanka.

The embassy said Sri Lanka’s telecommunications infrastructure, favourable geographical location and relatively lenient visa policies had encouraged fraud gangs to move to the South Asian nation.

In 2024, Sri Lankan authorities detained 230 Chinese nationals and 200 Indians accused of operating cybercrime centres in various parts of the island. –AFP



Prison guards escort foreign nationals to a court in Kaduwela, a suburb of Colombo, Sri Lanka yesterday after their arrest on suspicion of running cybercam centres. –AFP

Mortar attack on northwest Pakistan market kills 6: police

PESHAWAR, Pakistan – Six people, including two children, were killed when mortar shells hit a market in a turbulent area of northwestern Pakistan, a police official said yesterday.

The attack took place in the Thall area of Hangu district in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which borders Afghanistan and also lies adjacent to Pakistan’s formerly self-governed tribal areas.

The blast also wounded 13 people, three of whom were in critical condition, and there were fears the death toll could rise, local police officer Tariq Habib said.

“As efforts were underway to evacuate the wounded, the attackers targeted the same location again,” Habib said.

Security forces cordoned off the area while rescue teams transported

the wounded to nearby hospitals.

Officials said security had been tightened as authorities worked to prevent further attacks.

No group has yet claimed responsibility for the attack.

Hangu has long experienced sporadic violence by militant groups such as Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which is active in the region.

There has been an increase in militant attacks in Pakistan by such groups since the Afghan Taliban took over in Kabul in 2021, according to analysts and Pakistan government officials.

Islamabad has accused neighbouring Afghanistan of failing to root out militants sheltering on Afghan soil as they prepare to stage assaults on Pakistan, a charge the Taliban government in Kabul denies. –AFP

Women linked to IS fighters charged with slavery after landing in Australia

SYDNEY – Counter-terrorism forces arrested two women for slavery yesterday as they returned to Australia from Syria, where they allegedly committed “crimes against humanity” while supporting Islamic State jihadists.

The women and their children – all Australian citizens – landed yesterday evening after years spent in a Syrian detention camp where they have languished since the group’s demise.

Police arrested the women immediately after they landed at Melbourne international airport.

They were among four women and nine children returning to Australia for the first time after allegedly sneaking into Syria to join the Islamic State group’s self-declared caliphate in the early 2010s.

Australian Federal Police counter-terrorism boss Stephen Nutt said a 53-year-old woman was accused of a raft of “crimes against humanity”, including possessing a slave, using a slave, and slave trading.

A 31-year-old woman faced two slavery charges, Nutt said.

“The women will appear before a court once they have been charged,” he said.

Nutt said there was little else he could say given the looming legal process, but confirmed the slavery charges allegedly took place in Syria.

“All I can say is the safety of the community is the number one priority for all agencies involved,” he told reporters.

A third woman, 32, was arrested after landing in Sydney and would



An Australian woman returning from Syrian refugee camps where they have been staying since the Islamic State’s demise walks past members of the media as they arrive at the airport in Melbourne yesterday. –AFP

be charged with travelling to a banned area and joining a terrorist organisation, he said.

A fourth woman travelling with the group had not been arrested.

Hundreds of women from Western nations were lured to the Middle East as the Islamic State group gained prominence, in many cases following husbands who had signed up as jihadist fighters.

Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and others are still grappling with how to treat citizens stranded after the group collapsed.

‘Horror choice’

There was a heavy police presence at both airports ahead of the arrivals, according to AFP journalists in Sydney and Melbourne.

Australia made it an offence to travel to the Islamic State’s stronghold of Raqqa province in Syria between 2014 and 2017, an

attempt to stop its citizens joining the militant group.

Widely known as the “ISIS brides”, the case has stirred strong feelings in Australia.

Australia’s Human Rights Commission urged the government in March to help repatriate 34 women and children stuck in Syria’s notorious Roj detention camp.

But others have accused the women of turning their back on Australia and believe they should be left to face the consequences.

Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke has accused the four returning Australian women of making “a horrific choice to join a dangerous terrorist organisation”.

They are not the first Australian citizens to return from Syria’s refugee camps.

Small groups of women and children flew back to Australia in 2019, 2022 and 2025. –AFP

S Korea’s ex-PM’s martial law sentence cut to 15 years on appeal

Kang Jin-kyu

SEOUL – A South Korean appeals court reduced the sentence of former prime minister Han Duck-soo yesterday by eight years for crimes relating to ex-president Yoon Suk Yeol’s martial law declaration.

Yoon’s decree in December 2024 briefly suspended civilian rule and plunged South Korea into chaos, but only lasted around six hours as opposition lawmakers moved quickly to overturn it in a vote.

A lower court had sentenced Han in January to a heavier-than-expected jail term of 23 years for engaging in the declaration.

An appeals court in the capital Seoul cut that by eight years yesterday, with the presiding judge announcing: “We sentence the defendant to 15 years in prison.”

The court still maintained most of Han’s convictions, but lessened the penalties after taking into account his “more than 50 years as a public official prior to the martial law declaration”.

“The records also make it difficult to find evidence showing that the defendant participated more actively in the insurrection,

such as by conspiring in advance or systematically leading the operation,” the judge said.

However, he said Han had “abandoned the grave responsibilities arising from the authority and position entrusted to him and instead sided with those participating in the acts of insurrection”.

After MPs passed the motion to lift martial law, Han convened and presided over a cabinet meeting on Yoon’s behalf to rescind it, the court said.

Han, wearing a white shirt and a dark suit with no tie, listened to the verdict without showing much emotion.

The judge chided Han for failing to oppose Yoon despite having witnessed illegal suspensions of civilian rule in the 1970s and ‘80s while serving as a government official during South Korea’s authoritarian era.

“He had experienced unconstitutional and unlawful martial law measures and insurrectionary situations himself, and was therefore well aware of the extensive damage and chaos such events could cause, as well as their seriousness and gravity,” he said.

Han, 76, has been imprisoned since his original sentence in January.

The career technocrat formerly served in various other government roles, including finance minister, and the court noted his “multiple” awards for services to the South Korean state.

String of appeals

The verdict marked the conclusion of the latest in a string of appeal trials involving people close to Yoon.

Last week, a court hiked Yoon’s sentence for obstructing justice to seven years, up from five.

The former leader is already serving a life sentence for the much more serious crime of leading an insurrection.

Yoon’s wife, former first lady Kim Keon Hee, has also had her corruption sentence increased to four years, up from 20 months.

Her crimes are not related to the martial law decree and involve bribery and stock manipulation.

A lower court initially acquitted her of the latter charge, but an appeals court overturned that decision last week, resulting in the heavier penalty. –AFP

US left-wing Democrats demand end to silence on Israel nuclear policy

WASHINGTON – Left-wing Democratic lawmakers have called on the United States to break its silence on Israel's suspected nuclear weapons programme, shattering a decades-long bipartisan reticence in Washington on the sensitive issue.

Israel is widely believed to have developed nuclear weapons in the 1960s but keeps a deliberately ambiguous policy by neither confirming nor denying its arsenal, which is not subject to any international monitoring.

Some 30 Democratic lawmakers led by Representative Joaquin Castro said that the United States needed clear answers after President Donald Trump joined Israel in a war against Iran, launched in part over charges that Tehran has been seeking to build a

weapon through its nominally civilian nuclear programme.

"We cannot develop coherent non-proliferation policy for the Middle East, including with respect to Iran's civil nuclear program and Saudi Arabia's civil nuclear ambitions, while maintaining a policy of official silence about the nuclear weapons capabilities of one party central to the ongoing conflict in which the United States is a direct participant," they wrote in the letter made public on Wednesday.

"We ask that you hold Israel to the same standard of transparency that the United States expects from any other country that may be pursuing or retaining nuclear weapons capability."

The lawmakers asked Secretary of State Marco Rubio to reply by May 18 to explain Israel's nuclear capabilities as well as its nuclear doctrine, including whether Israel could use the ultra-destructive weapons in Iran.

They also asked for an assessment of risk for US citizens of any future Iranian strike on Israel's secretive Dimona nuclear research centre. Iranian missiles injured dozens nearby in March, stunning residents of the tightly guarded desert town.

It is highly unlikely the Trump administration will respond on Israel's nuclear programme, on which US administrations across party lines have long refused to comment.

In 2006, then defence secretary Robert Gates indirectly appeared to confirm Israel's

nuclear programme in testimony to Congress while discussing Iran.

After the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack on Israel, a far-right Israeli minister said the country could drop a nuclear bomb on Gaza, a comment from which Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu distanced himself.

Prominent Democrats who signed the letter include representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Ro Khanna.

The intervention comes amid escalating criticism of Israel from Democrats. The party has almost universally condemned Trump's decision to join the Iran war, with many lawmakers saying their former president Joe Biden should have been tougher on Israel over its relentless military campaign in Gaza. –AFP

Netanyahu says 'no terrorist immune' after Israel kills Hezbollah commander



First responders yesterday inspect the rubble of a collapsed building following an Israeli airstrike a day earlier in Beirut's southern suburb of Haret Hreik. –AFP

JERUSALEM – Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu yesterday said Israel killed a senior Hezbollah commander in Beirut the day before, saying "no terrorist is immune" from Israeli strikes.

"Last night, we eliminated, in the heart of Beirut, the commander of Hezbollah's Radwan force," Netanyahu said, in a video released by his office, referring to an elite Hezbollah unit.

"I say to our enemies in the clearest possible terms: no terrorist is immune. Anyone who threatens the State of Israel will die because of his actions."

Fighting between Israel and Hezbollah

has continued despite a ceasefire, though Wednesday's strike on Beirut's southern suburbs – where Hezbollah holds sway – was the first in the area in nearly a month.

The army said that after the strike the security guidelines for Israeli citizens were unchanged, though it "continues to conduct ongoing situational assessments in the northern sector".

Events scheduled for yesterday that had previously been exempted from the guidelines "in the northern border area have been cancelled due to the possibility of enemy fire by the Hezbollah terrorist organisation", it added. –AFP

Spain confirms 30-tonne cocaine haul after Atlantic seizure

MADRID – Spanish authorities said yesterday that a massive cocaine shipment intercepted in the Atlantic Ocean weighs 30 tonnes, clarifying the scale of a record haul initially estimated at up to 40 tonnes.

The confirmed total has an estimated value of 812 million euros (US\$956 million), Spain's top criminal court, the Audiencia Nacional, said in a judicial order.

The 23 crew members aboard the vessel when it was intercepted by the Civil Guard on May 1 in international waters off Spain's Canary Islands have been placed in pre-trial detention, it added.

They include 17 Filipinos, five Dutch nationals, and one person from Suriname.

The Civil Guard's main AUGC union first announced the operation on Monday, saying "between 35 and 40 tonnes of cocaine" had been seized in what is believed to be a national record haul of the drug.

Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska

has called the seizure "one of the largest, not only nationally but also internationally," without providing further details.

He is scheduled to hold a news conference today about the operation.

The latest confirmed total surpasses recent major busts, including 13 tonnes of cocaine seized in 2024 at the port of Algeciras from a container ship arriving from Ecuador, then the largest seizure of its kind in the country.

The latest ship to be intercepted had departed from Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, and was sailing towards Benghazi in Libya.

Investigators believe the vessel likely intended to transfer its cargo to smaller boats for onward trafficking into Europe.

Spain remains a key entry point for drugs into Europe owing to its close ties with Latin America, a major source of cocaine, and its proximity to North Africa, including Morocco, a major cannabis producer. –AFP

Man arrested 'with weapon' near ex-prince Andrew's home: UK police

LONDON – UK police said yesterday they had arrested a man wielding a weapon who "was behaving in an intimidating manner" close to the home of former prince Andrew in eastern England.

Norfolk police confirmed they had been called to an incident late Wednesday (local time) near the Sandringham Estate "and the man was arrested on suspicion of a public order offence and possession of an offensive weapon".

UK media reported that a man wearing a balaclava had allegedly threatened Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, when he was out walking his dogs in the eastern Sandringham area.

The man had been sitting in his car when he saw Mountbatten-Windsor, and allegedly got out of the vehicle and headed towards the ex-prince shouting at him, the *Daily Telegraph* said.

Andrew had been accompanied by a member of his private security, and fled to his own car, driving away at speed, the newspaper added.

It was the first media outlet to report on the incident.

Norfolk police said in a statement that "officers were called to Wolferton shortly after 7:30 p.m. yesterday [Wednesday]".

The man "was taken to King's Lynn police investigation centre for questioning and remains in custody".

Andrew, the second of the late queen Elizabeth II's three sons and brother to King Charles III, was arrested in mid-February amid new revelations stemming from his ties to the late billionaire US sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

He was questioned for hours at a police station on suspicion of misconduct in public office during his decade-long role as a UK trade envoy.

Mountbatten-Windsor has denied any wrongdoing, and has not been charged, but remains under police caution.

Andrew was stripped of his royal titles in October by the king amid the growing scandal around Epstein, who died in prison in 2019.

He has also been ousted from his previous home at Royal Lodge in Windsor, and has moved to the king's private Sandringham estate. –AFP

Sweden plans electronic bracelets to monitor kids at risk of gang recruitment

STOCKHOLM – Sweden said yesterday it planned to introduce electronic bracelets to monitor children at risk of being recruited by criminal gangs, the government's latest measure aimed at cracking down on deadly gang violence.

Social services would be able to assign the bracelets to children and youths aged 13 and up, the government said, estimating that around 50 to 100 kids would be monitored to ensure they were respecting curfews decided by social services.

Criminal gangs in Sweden increasingly recruit children and youths to commit murders and other violent acts, knowing they will not face prison time if caught as the age of criminal responsibility has until now been 15.

As of July 1, the age will be reduced to 13, for crimes punishable by at least four years in prison.

The electronic bracelet would be designed to look "like a watch or bracelet, so it wouldn't be as obvious or stigmatising" as an ankle bracelet used for convicted criminals, Social Services Minister Camilla Waltersson Gronvall told reporters.

She said there were "173 children under the age of 15 suspected of being involved in murders or murder plots".

In addition, there were 52 so-called evidentiary proceedings against children last year, a legal process where a court decides if a child under the age of criminal responsibility is guilty, but the child is not punished.

The electronic bracelet proposal has faced criticism from children's rights organisations, Sweden's National Council for Crime Prevention, and UNICEF, who have all expressed concerns about children's civil liberties.

Swedish police have since October 2025 been allowed to wiretap electronic communications of children under the age of 15.

"When children are at risk of falling into the clutches of serious criminals, we must have more tools to protect them," Waltersson Gronvall said in a statement.

"Electronic monitoring should be usable in serious situations, in order to break a destructive pattern in time and guarantee the child's safety," she said.

Sweden's minority right-wing government, propped up by the far-right Sweden Democrats, has been pushing through a rash of proposals aimed at curbing crime and immigration in the run-up to Sweden's general election on September 13. –AFP

100 years on Earth: Iconic naturalist Attenborough marks century

Caroline Taix

LONDON – David Attenborough, a leading voice on climate change and biodiversity loss whose landmark documentaries transformed popular understanding of the natural world for a global audience, marks his 100th birthday today.

Attenborough's natural history series, such as "Life on Earth", in which he had a famous encounter with mountain gorillas in Rwanda, have brought the most remote corners of the planet into living rooms worldwide.

"He's taken us all to places that we would never otherwise go. That's a huge gift," botanist Sandra Knapp, director of research at London's Natural History Museum, told AFP.

The BBC is leading the celebration of the Briton's centenary with a full week of programming dedicated to his life.

Classic episodes of series including "Planet Earth II" and "Blue Planet II" are being reshown along with others such as "Life in the Freezer" and "Paradise Birds" available on the BBC's iPlayer service.

The centrepiece will be a 90-minute live show on his birthday from London's Royal Albert Hall.

Knapp said Attenborough's programmes had "expanded people's horizons" and been an inspiration to many.

Jean-Baptiste Gouyon, professor of science communication at

University College London (UCL), said Attenborough had made natural history as popular as football.

Attenborough's programmes succeeded in instilling in the public an unparalleled passion and wonder for the natural world, said Gouyon.

Attenborough's lifelong passion for the natural world began as child, and he went on to study geology and zoology at university.

Prince William, heir to the UK throne, has described him as a "national treasure". Attenborough was also a firm favourite of the late Queen Elizabeth II, who knighted him in 1985.

Showing Attenborough's cross-generational appeal, US singer-songwriter Billie Eilish has praised his "deep love and knowledge of our planet", adding: "The animal kingdom brings out the childlike curiosity within us all."

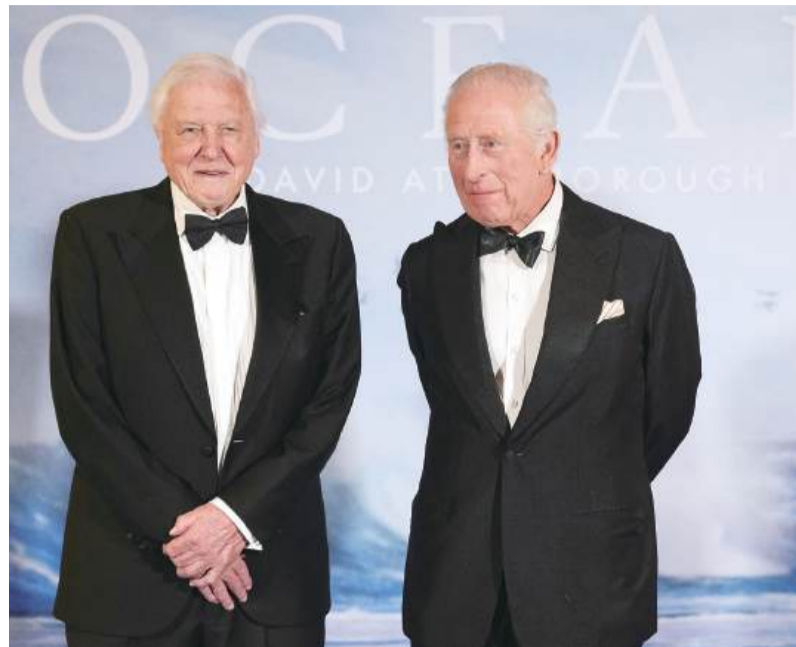
Mountain gorillas

Attenborough has often reflected on his "luck" in being able to "find and film rare creatures that few outsiders have seen in the wild".

And he has said he has been able "to gaze on some of the most marvellous spectacles that the wild places of the world have to offer".

In 2006, he added his voice to those raising the alarm on climate change and biodiversity loss.

He declared himself "no longer sceptical" about the issue, having waited for conclusive proof that



Britain's King Charles III (right) poses next to British broadcaster and naturalist David Attenborough upon arrival to attend the World Premier "Ocean with David Attenborough" at the Royal Festival Hall, in London, on May 6, 2025. – AFP

humanity was changing the climate.

Attenborough's broadcasting career spanning nearly eight decades has been closely associated with the BBC, which he joined in the early 1950s.

"Life on Earth", released in 1979, has alone been watched by 500 million people worldwide, while dozens of documentaries and associated books have made him a household name.

Recalling the series' highlight, when he unexpectedly found himself up close with a group of mountain gorillas, Attenborough described the experience as "bliss"

and "extraordinary".

"I was simply transported," he said ahead of his centenary, reliving how the adult female twisted his head and looked straight into his eyes and her two youngsters sat on him as the cameras rolled.

'Modern colonialism'

Still making documentaries well into his nineties, he used his 2025 film "Ocean" to condemn the industrial fishing methods of wealthy nations, which he called "modern colonialism at sea".

Despite his fame, the

broadcaster – whose brother was the late actor and film director Richard Attenborough – has always refused to be seen as a celebrity.

Gouyon said Attenborough always made sure to direct the viewer's gaze back to the subject matter.

On the threat to the natural world, Attenborough has said he hopes humanity will be able to change course.

"Perhaps the fact that the people most affected by climate change are no longer some imagined future generation, but young people alive today... will give us the impetus we need to rewrite our story, to turn this tragedy into a triumph," he said at the UN Climate Summit in Glasgow in 2021.

"We are, after all, the greatest problem-solvers to have ever existed on Earth," he said.

At 100, Attenborough no longer wanders the world's jungles and deserts.

But he has continued to tell the story of the planet closer to home.

In "Wild London", broadcast early this year, he marvels at the wildlife of the British capital, his birthplace, from foxes and beavers to hedgehogs and harvest mice.

After all his travels, he has confided that his favourite place remains Richmond, an affluent and leafy suburb in southwest London.

He has lived in the riverside town for many years, and still resides in the family home he shared with his late wife Jane and their two children. – AFP

US underlines 'strong' Vatican ties after Rubio meets pope

Léon Bruneau

VATICAN CITY – The US State Department underlined its "strong relationship" with the Vatican yesterday after talks between top diplomat Marco Rubio and Pope Leo XIV, following Donald Trump's astonishing attack on the first US pontiff.

"The conversations today were friendly and constructive," a State Department official told AFP following the US secretary of state's private audience at the Vatican yesterday.

Rubio's visit came after US President Trump accused Leo, the head of the world's 1.4 billion Catholics, of being "weak on crime and terrible for foreign policy" after he made critical comments about the Middle East war.

After the talks, US State Department spokesman Tommy Pigott said Leo and Rubio discussed the Middle East as well as their mutual interests in the Western Hemisphere – a phrase used by the US to refer to Latin America.

"The meeting underscored the strong relationship between the United States and the Holy See and their shared commitment to promoting peace and human dignity," he said.

Rubio also met with Vatican Secretary of State Pietro Parolin,



Pope Leo XIV (left) meets with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio during a private audience at the Vatican yesterday. – AFP

with whom he discussed subjects including religious freedom, according to Pigott.

The Vatican said the "cordial" discussions had addressed global conflicts and humanitarian issues, "as well as the need to work tirelessly for peace".

Rubio, the pope and Parolin also expressed a "shared commitment to cultivate good bilateral relations", the Holy See said in a statement.

Leo gave Rubio a pen made of olive wood, noting that "the olive tree is a plant of peace".

Among the US gifts for the 70-year-old pontiff, a notable

sports fan, was a small crystal American football.

'We'll listen to him'

The US diplomat, a devout Catholic, had earlier sought to play down the rift between Trump and the pope, which sparked global headlines and risked alienating Catholic US voters.

For the Vatican's part, "we'll listen to him", Parolin had said on Wednesday, noting that Washington initiated the meeting.

The Trump administration had celebrated the election one year ago – May 8, 2025 – of Leo, the

first US pontiff in history.

But its relations with the Holy See have since sharply deteriorated.

Trump's unprecedented attack came after Leo called for peace in the Middle East war launched by Israel and the United States.

The pontiff condemned a threat by Trump to destroy Iranian civilisation as "truly unacceptable".

Before leaving for Rome, Rubio said the trip had been planned before the clash, adding: "There's a lot to talk about with the Vatican."

On Thursday, a US source hailed the welcome extended to Rubio, saying it "exceeded expectations".

Rubio's motorcade entered the Vatican through the Arch of Bells, an honour normally accorded to heads of state, and he was greeted by the Swiss Guard.

A US official confirmed that the Catholic Church's work in Cuba was discussed.

The Holy See has long played an active role in Cuban diplomacy, while Rubio – a Cuban-American – has led the US administration's efforts to bring major change to the communist-run country.

Pope being pope

Despite the peace-making attempt, Trump again criticised the

pope in an interview on Monday, alleging that Leo believes it is "OK for Iran to have a nuclear weapon".

"I think he's endangering a lot of Catholics and a lot of people," Trump said.

Asked about the comments on Tuesday, Leo said that the Catholic Church's mission was to "preach peace" and the Gospel.

"If anyone wishes to criticise me for proclaiming the Gospel, let them do so truthfully," he told reporters.

"The Church has spoken out against all nuclear weapons for years, so there is no doubt about that, and I simply hope to be heard for the sake of the value of God's word."

At an event on Wednesday, Parolin said that attacking the pope "seems a little strange to me", adding: "The pope is being the pope."

Leo's nationality means his words carry more weight in Washington than those of his predecessors – and he has used them, notably criticising the Trump administration's crackdown on immigration.

The pope and Rubio met for the first time last year at the Vatican, alongside US Vice President JD Vance, a Catholic convert, just days after Leo's election. – AFP

Hantavirus on the Hondius: what we know

Geneva, Switzerland

GENEVA, Switzerland – The MV Hondius cruise ship, hit by a rare hantavirus outbreak believed to have killed three people, was sailing from Cape Verde yesterday towards the Spanish island of Tenerife where isolating passengers and crew will be finally be evacuated.

Here is what we know so far about the situation on the Hondius, which has sparked international alarm since news of the outbreak emerged last weekend.

Who is on board?

There are 149 people on the MV Hondius, the ship's Dutch operator Oceanwide Expeditions told AFP yesterday.

There are 23 nationalities on board. There are more than 80 passengers, with the largest groups from Britain, the United States and Spain. Most of the crew are from the Philippines.

Following Wednesday's evacuation of three suspected cases, the ship operator said yesterday "no symptomatic individuals are present on board".

Cases

There are three confirmed cases of hantavirus, according to health authorities – a Dutch woman who died in hospital in Johannesburg, a British man being treated in Johannesburg, and a Swiss national in hospital in Zurich, who left the cruise in Saint Helena.

There are also five suspected cases of the virus: two people who have died and three evacuated from the ship.

Three deaths

A Dutch couple who had travelled around South America before boarding the ship in Ushuaia, Argentina on April 1 were the first fatalities.

The husband, 70, showed



This aerial view shows health personnel assisting patients in moving onto a boat from the cruise ship MV Hondius, while stationary off the port of Praia, the capital of Cape Verde, on Wednesday. – AFP

symptoms on April 6 and died on April 11. His body was taken off the ship during its April 22-24 call at Saint Helena, a British-ruled island in the south Atlantic.

His 69-year-old wife, who was feeling unwell, also left the ship at Saint Helena. Her health deteriorated during an April 25 flight to Johannesburg and she died in hospital a day later, with hantavirus confirmed on May 4.

A German passenger who developed a fever on April 28, which became pneumonia, died on May 2. Her body remains on the ship.

Evacuees

A British passenger became ill on April 24 with signs of fever and pneumonia and was evacuated from Britain's Atlantic island of Ascension to South Africa, where he is in intensive care. Hantavirus was confirmed on May 2.

Two crew members, one British and one Dutch, also showed symptoms. They were evacuated from Cape Verde's capital Praia on Wednesday along with a passenger with no symptoms but with links to

the German woman who died.

A medical plane carrying two evacuees landed at Amsterdam on Wednesday, while another air ambulance believed to be carrying the third evacuee landed there yesterday.

The virus

The rare disease is usually spread from infected rodents, typically through urine, droppings and saliva.

Laboratory testing in South Africa and Switzerland confirmed the two patients being treated in those countries had the Andes strain of hantavirus – the only one known to pass between humans.

There are no vaccines or specific treatments for hantavirus.

However, officials including the head of the World Health Organisation (WHO) said the overall public health risk from the current outbreak was low, as very close contact is needed for it to spread.

Contact tracing

The WHO has said that contact tracing is under way for people on the April 25 commercial flight taken by the Dutch woman from Saint Helena

to Johannesburg before she died.

Dutch airline KLM indicated on Wednesday that the Dutch woman who died had also been "briefly" on its flight from Johannesburg to the Netherlands on April 25, but was removed before take-off.

A flight attendant on that flight is currently being tested for hantavirus after showing mild symptoms and being admitted to hospital in Amsterdam, the Dutch health ministry said yesterday.

Two Singapore residents who had been aboard the Hondius have been isolated and are being tested for hantavirus, Singapore officials said yesterday.

Former passengers in Britain and the United States are also reportedly under observation.

A small number of people on Saint Helena, who had close, prolonged contact with unwell passengers, have been asked to isolate for 45 days.

Argentina's health ministry said on Wednesday it was sending experts to Ushuaia to capture and test rodents for the virus "in areas linked to the route" the Dutch couple took.

The journey

The cruise began on April 1, with

114 guests boarding at Ushuaia, Oceanwide Expeditions said.

After South Georgia, Tristan da Cunha and other Atlantic islands, the vessel called at Saint Helena, where 30 guests disembarked on April 24.

The Hondius then stopped at Ascension Island on April 27, before anchoring off Praia, the capital of Cape Verde, from Sunday until it set sail for the Canaries on Wednesday.

What is happening on board?

The WHO said passengers were being asked to isolate in their cabins while disinfection and other measures are being taken.

A former passenger told AFP that life carried on as usual aboard the ship after the captain announced the first passenger's death.

"We again kept eating all together... and we didn't wear any masks," said Turkish national Ruhi Cenet, who left the cruise in Saint Helena.

What's next?

Spain's health ministry has said the ship is expected in Tenerife on Sunday, with evacuation of passengers set to start on May 11. – AFP

Portugal's last circus elephant becomes pioneer for European exiles



This undated handout picture taken at an unknown location and released by the Victor Hugo Cardinali Circus on Wednesday, shows Julie (left), the last circus elephant in Portugal, pictured next to a companion. – AFP

Thomas Cabral

LISBON – Portugal's last circus elephant, Julie, is to become one of the first residents of a retirement home for the pachyderms that could become a major draw as European nations clamp down on performing animals.

Julie, who joined the Victor Hugo Cardinali circus in 1988, will follow Kariba, who has been based at a Belgian zoo, in moving to the British-run Pangea Trust sanctuary in Alentejo, southern Portugal, next month

Julie, who is aged about 40 and came originally from southern Africa, had not been part of the circus show since 2024, when Portugal joined a host of countries who have banned performing animals.

According to Pangea managing director Kate Moore, there are more than 600 elephants in circuses and zoos across Europe. And many may need a new home but the 400-hectare sanctuary can take a maximum of 30.

"Many circuses and some zoos in Europe are reaching the point – through changing legislation, the loss of a companion, or simply a decision to move on – where keeping elephants is no longer possible or appropriate," said Moore.

"We can only take a small number of the 600 elephants but elephants like Julie and Kariba would be priority because elephants are really social animals and it's not good for them to be kept on their own," she told AFP.

"They need companionship and we want to bring them together."

Circus director Victor Hugo Cardinali said he would be closely involved in Julie's move.

"This has not been an easy decision, as she has been a member of our family for decades, but we believe it is the right decision for Julie. Working with Pangea on her transition to her new home was a critical factor in our deliberations," Cardinali said. – AFP

Brazilian lawmakers pass bill incentivising mineral exploitation

BRASÍLIA – Brazil's Chamber of Deputies on Wednesday approved a bill that expands governmental powers over rare earth minerals and incentivises the private sector to exploit the country's vast reserves.

The bill's approval came one day before President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was set to meet his US counterpart Donald Trump at the White House.

Brazil holds the world's second-

largest reserves of these elements used in everything from electric vehicles, solar panels and smart phones to jet engines and guided missiles.

The complex process of separating rare earth minerals is currently dominated by Chinese companies, but the United States is seeking to catch up and has expressed interest in Brazilian reserves.

Lula views foreign investment

in a positive light but has insisted that rare earths be processed within Brazil rather than exported as raw materials.

The bill was approved with majority support from both the ruling party and the opposition.

It grants the government the power to veto agreements with foreign companies "that may affect the country's economic or geopolitical security," as well as the right to approve "changes in corporate control" of companies in the sector.

The law, set to be debated by the Senate, also provides tax incentives for mining companies.

Lawmaker Arnaldo Jardim said the bill allowed Brazil to go beyond exporting minerals and "use this geological attribute as a clear instrument for development."

Greenpeace criticised the bill's approval for "lacking in transparency, without broad debate involving civil society, experts or potentially affected communities."

"Everything suggests that the text is being drafted to please the mining industry," said Gabriela Nepomuceno, public policy specialist at Greenpeace Brazil. – AFP



Brazil's Minister of the Environment and Climate Change Marina Silva (left) sits next to the president of the Chamber of Deputies Hugo Motta during the passing of a rare elements bill at the Chamber of Deputies in Brasilia on Wednesday. Lawmakers passed the bill that expands the federal government's powers over rare earth resources and offers incentives to the private sector to exploit the country's vast reserves. – AFP

Mbappe, Mourinho, meltdown: Real Madrid face Clasico amid chaos

LALIGA MADRID – Real Madrid meet Clasico rivals Barcelona on Sunday in a state of high tension and disarray, with anything but a victory handing the Catalans the La Liga title.

Alvaro Arbeloa's side trail the reigning champions by 11 points with four matches remaining and are sinking towards a second straight season without a major trophy.

At a club that values success above all else, it is perhaps not surprising that Madrid are in meltdown, splintering under the strain.

The mood around the club has become toxic. Fans are protesting against star player Kylian Mbappe for a perceived lack of commitment, while there are stories of multiple training ground bust-ups, including one reported to have sent midfielder Fede Ververde to hospital.

Exacerbating the situation, president Florentino Perez is weighing up a dramatic managerial twist, with former coach Jose Mourinho linked with a return to the Santiago Bernabeu.

Current incumbent Arbeloa, who replaced Xabi Alonso in January, is at loggerheads with several players.

Amid the maelstrom, defender Ferland Mendy was ruled out for several months with a thigh injury. A subsequent report suggests he could be out for up to a year. When it rains, it pours.

Madrid's preparations for the Clasico have been disrupted by internal conflict.

Midfielders Aurelien Tchouameni and Valverde rowed furiously on Wednesday after a foul in training, according to newspaper *Marca*.

Then yesterday they clashed again, the matter unresolved, and Uruguay captain Valverde, according to reports, needed stitches for a facial cut.

"The differences between players are evident, and some barely speak to each other," wrote the Spanish daily of the tension at the club.

"Living with Alvaro Arbeloa is also difficult, in a context where pressure and exhaustion have finally reached their breaking point - as many as six players refuse to speak to him."

It follows another reported issue between defenders Antonio Rudiger and Alvaro Carreras a fortnight ago, which the latter said had been dealt with.

"Regarding the incident with a team-mate, it was an isolated, unimportant issue, which has since been resolved," said Carreras on Instagram this week. "My relationship with the whole team is very good."

Carreras, usually first choice at left-back, was pictured laughing after Fran Garcia replaced the injured Mendy in that position instead of him during Sunday's win at Espanyol.

On another occasion veteran right-back Dani Carvajal, frustrated at his own lack of minutes, appeared to mock Trent Alexander-Arnold's perceived lack of defensive worth ethic.

Mbappe criticism

Mbappe is a doubt for the Clasico because of a hamstring injury, with the forward heavily criticised by fans after he went on holiday to Sardinia during his recovery process.

An "Mbappe Out" petition asking for change for the sake of the club's future claims to have nearly 30 million signatures.

A source from Mbappe's camp told AFP the criticism of the team's top goalscorer was exaggerated. However, even coach Arbeloa, who has treated his superstars with kid gloves, indicated he wanted more dedication.

"We didn't build Real Madrid with players who play in tuxedos, but with players who finish matches with shirts full of sweat and mud, through effort and sacrifice," said Arbeloa after Madrid beat Espanyol without Mbappe, to delay Barca's title celebrations.

Adding volatile former coach Mourinho into the situation appears a reckless choice but the Portuguese coach is seemingly Perez's favourite candidate to take over.

The Madrid president has respected Mourinho since his controversially packed 2010-2013 spell at the club, which disrupted Pep Guardiola's dominant Barcelona side and contributed to the Catalan coach's burnout and ultimate decision to depart.

Madrid are a team which have lost a lot of leaders in recent years - Luka Modric, Toni Kroos and Nacho Fernandez, to name a few.

From the most optimistic standpoint Mourinho could galvanise the bulk of the squad behind him and restore order to a dressing room which has lost discipline. Many believe it would just end in flames.

First Madrid must get on with the business of seeing Barca crowned champions - but even at a divided club, nobody wants that to be in front of their faces this weekend at Camp Nou.

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

– AFP/MPD

Dozens remanded in custody after post-PSG match unrest

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE PARIS – Parisian authorities have remanded in custody 95 people, including nine minors, following unrest in the French capital after Paris Saint-Germain reached the Champions League final, the public prosecutor's office said yesterday.

Another 14 minors outside of Paris were also remanded in custody after celebrations turned violent following PSG's 1-1 draw against Bayern Munich in Germany that sealed a 6-5 aggregate victory in the semi-final.

The Public prosecutor's office said that those remanded in custody had been arrested for offences including "participating with a weapon in a gathering after being ordered to disperse" and of "participation in a gathering aimed at preparing violence or vandalism".

The interior ministry added that some were detained for "violence against police officers", and in some cases with the use of weapons.

In the worst cases, those detained could face up to 10 years in prison and a fine of up to 150,000 euros.

Police arrested 127 people while 11 people were injured, including one seriously, during the incidents, Interior Minister Laurent Nunez said earlier.

Nunez said that 23 officers also



Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) supporters celebrate their team's progression to the Final of the UEFA Champions League near the Champs-Elysees after their second-leg semi-final against Bayern Munich, on Wednesday.

The holders set up a Champions League final against Arsenal after a 1-1 second-leg draw at Bayern Munich secured a 6-5 aggregate victory.

– AFP

suffered minor injuries in the violence.

"One hundred and twenty-seven people were arrested in the Paris area, including 107 in Paris," Nunez told CNews television channel and Europe 1 radio station.

"Eleven people were injured, including one seriously with a firework," he added, while condemning the incidents.

The public prosecutor's office told AFP that the arrests were for the "participation in a congregation aimed at committing acts of violence, for setting off fireworks, for violence and for causing damage by fire".

Several vehicles were damaged in the unrest.

Nunez warned that police would act "just as forcefully" against such incidents on May 30, when PSG will play Arsenal in the Champions League final in Budapest, seeking to win Europe's top club competition for the second year in a row.

"We won't tolerate unrest," he said.

He also criticised Paris's new mayor Emmanuel Gregoire for having "unilaterally" announced that there would be a fan zone in the capital on May 30.

"Normally we talk about that a bit with the police prefect beforehand, which didn't happen," he said.

– AFP

Carrick says strong finish matters more than his Man Utd future



LONDON – Michael Carrick said yesterday he is more worried about Manchester United finishing the season in style than his own future at Old Trafford.

The 44-year-old former United midfielder returned to the English football giants as interim manager until the end of the campaign shortly after the end of Ruben Amorim's ill-fated reign in January.

Carrick has overseen a huge upturn in the Red Devils' fortunes and Sunday's 3-2 win over arch-rivals Liverpool meant United qualified for the Champions League with three games to spare.

Nevertheless, Carrick's long-term position remains uncertain, a situation that threatens to have implications for United's transfer policy following the conclusion of the current campaign.

"Clarity is important," said Carrick ahead of tomorrow's trip to Sunderland.

"I think moving forward, it's

come at the time, right at the end of the season, where I think we've finished strong, put ourselves in a good position.

"And obviously the situation of my role and what it looks like moving forward, I think it's just the natural time. It was always spoke about towards the end of the season, if not the end of the season, so nothing has really changed, to be honest."

Carrick, asked why his position had seemingly not been strengthened by securing a return to the Champions League, replied: "It's a matter of days ago and we've got eyes on finishing the season strongly as well."

"I understand the question, I understand the timing of it, but from my point of view right at this stage it's just putting the boys in a place to finish the season strongly."

"Then, as I've said all along, and I'm calm about it, it'll get sorted out when it's going to get sorted out. Some of it's out of my

hands, so we'll see what happens."

While Carrick has been coy over his future, several United players have backed him to continue as manager with Kobbie Mainoo, fresh from scoring the winner against Liverpool, saying the team are willing to die for him.

Carrick, asked if he would do anything differently if he became the full-time, as opposed to caretaker boss, said: "It's a good question. I've said from the start I've never approached a day here in terms of any short-term decisions."

"Whether that's different to the outlook of others, I don't know."

"But from myself and the staff we've made decisions for the longer-term for the group and individually, players, how we treat them and try to help develop them."

He added: "Maybe we'll get to see, I don't know. But certainly, from my point of view, I've gone about it in a way that I feel is the right way to do it."

– AFP

Brazil must channel World Cup pressure into motivation: Luiz

Football

Esteban Rojas

Sao PAULO, Brazil – It has been 24 years since football powerhouse Brazil – the most successful nation in World Cup history – lifted the trophy, and forward Luiz Henrique told AFP the team must use that pressure as motivation when the tournament kicks off in June.

The winger, who plays for Russia's Zenit, was a baby when five-time winner Brazil last won the World Cup in 2002.

He is one of head coach Carlo Ancelotti's key attacking options for the World Cup in the United States, Canada, and Mexico, as Brazil grapples multiple injuries.

"Pressure is always a good thing. In football - and especially

with the national team - pressure is ever-present. We have to channel that pressure into motivation," Henrique, 25, told AFP in an interview from Saint Petersburg.

He said he "feels deeply" for defender Eder Militao and forward Estevao - who are both out with hamstring injuries - and Rodrygo who has suffered a severe knee injury.

"I'm going to wait for Ancelotti's

decision and see if he selects me. I want to play - to be in the starting eleven - and if he chooses me, I'll do exactly what I've always done: give it my absolute best."

The veteran Italian coach, appointed in May last year, has vowed to take Brazil back to the top.

Henrique said it was an honour working with "someone who has been a winner for so long."

"He helps a footballer evolve and instils a sense of calm in the players, allowing us to showcase our best football."

Ancelotti is expected to name his final World Cup squad on May 18.

Henrique said he would "love to play with Neymar", who has not played for Brazil since 2023 due to a serious knee injury but still hopes to be called up this year.

– AFP

Badminton looks to future with 'evolution and innovation'

Peter Stebbings

HONG KONG – Synthetic shuttlecocks, shorter games and a new generation of stars are all part of the "evolution" of badminton, a top official told AFP, saying the sport can't afford to sit still.

Traditionalists hit out after the Badminton World Federation said that from January 2027 it will adjust the scoring system, partly with an eye on the next generation of fans.

Currently matches are the best of three games, with the winner of each the first to 21 points. That will change to the first to 15.

Also last month, the BWF said it will trial synthetic shuttlecocks at lower-grade tournaments with a view to potentially using them at elite level.

Days later - in an unrelated move - double Olympic champion Viktor Axelsen retired aged 32, leaving a hole at the top of the men's game.

BWF secretary general Thomas Lund told AFP that badminton was well placed to thrive as it attempts to build on the immense popularity it already enjoys in Asia.

Members overwhelmingly approved 15-point games, but Lund conceded: "Of course there are some who have doubts about what that will mean for the game."

"I would say most of the traditionalists or sceptical voices in our community are - as I see it - the ones who are afraid that the sport will change."

"I would say this is rather seen as a tweak to the sporting aspects to the scoring system and the game... this is very much in line with how we see the game being played today, the DNA, how the game will evolve," Lund added.

It was also about "the welfare of players in terms of recovery" and making it more appealing to fans and broadcasters, he said.

Ruffled feathers

Part of any sport's allure is having big stars and badminton lost one in Lund's fellow Dane Axelsen.

Spain's 2016 Olympic champion Carolina Marin also left the sport in March at the same age after a long struggle with a knee injury.

Before them, the rivalry between

China's Lin Dan and Lee Chong Wei of Malaysia captivated and even transcended the sport until 2018.

Lund dismissed concerns that Axelsen's retirement and the lack of a rivalry akin to the Lin-Lee storyline hurts badminton.

"I've heard this for 40 years," he said.

"The sport that we sometimes compare ourselves with is tennis, and everybody was afraid of what will happen when (Roger) Federer and (Rafael) Nadal disappeared."

"I'm not sure people think about that now because others come up and play fantastic tennis, and now the same will happen with badminton," he said, pointing to how France last weekend reached the final of the Thomas Cup men's team event for the first time, losing to superpower China.

Another recent announcement which raised eyebrows among traditionalists concerns trying out synthetic shuttlecocks, amid concerns about costs and a shortage of duck and goose feathers.

"We believe that should be pushed and pursued," Lund said, adding it was "coming step-by-step".

The BWF said in April it will try synthetic shuttlecocks at selected events including junior international tournaments.

Asked if he saw a day when all of badminton uses synthetic shuttlecocks, Lund said: "I do hope at the highest level that we will be able to have a quality (synthetic) shuttle we can then use more and more across the tours and the major championships over the years."

Lund said that using synthetic shuttlecocks is also to do with making badminton more affordable at grassroots - the BWF says more than 300 million people play globally.

"It's important that these evolutions and innovations are done," he said.



Malaysia's former world number one badminton player Lee Chong Wei (left) and China's former world champion badminton player Lin Dan pose for a picture before being inducted into the Badminton World Federation (BWF) Hall of Fame 2023, in Kuala Lumpur on May 26, 2023. - AFP

Sport in brief

World No. 1 Sun survives scare as China sweeps S Korea at table tennis team worlds

Table tennis

LONDON – China beat South Korea 3-0 yesterday to advance to the women's team semifinals at the 2026 ITTF World Team Table Tennis Championships Finals, with world No. 1 Sun Yingsha surviving a five-game scare in the second match.

China had also defeated South Korea 3-0 in the group stage.

Wang Manyu gave China a strong start, beating Shin Yu-bin 11-1, 11-4, 11-4.

"I went all out in the first match, hoping to boost our team's morale," Wang said. "I made full preparations, both on tactics and mentality, and executed as well as I could."

Facing Kim Na-yeong again after their group meeting, Sun was pushed much harder.

After taking the opening game 11-7, Sun dropped the next two 11-

7, 11-7 and trailed 4-1 in the fourth. She then won 10 straight points to level the match and force a decider.

Kim threatened another upset in the fifth, closing from 9-5 down to within one point, but Sun held on to win 11-9.

"I expected her to perform better than in the group stage," Sun said. "I was a bit conservative with my adjustments in the second and third games. The comeback in the fourth gave me more confidence in my tactics."

In the third match, Wang Yidi beat Park Ga-hyeon 11-5, 11-3, 10-12, 11-2 to seal the tie.

"It was our second meeting here. I started quickly, but after leading 9-5 in the third game, I became impatient and lost my rhythm," Wang said. "I adjusted quickly in the fourth and stayed focused on my own game."

China will face either France or Romania in the semifinals.

- Xinhua

IOC rules out 'crossover' sports at 2030 Winter Olympics

LAUSANNE – The IOC yesterday ruled out adding year-round sports without snow or ice to the 2030 Winter Olympics but did not exclude the possibility at a later date.

Disciplines such as cross-country running, trail running, cyclocross and gravel cycling have all been mooted as possible 'crossover' contenders for inclusion in the 2030 Winter Games in the French Alps.

"We will vote on the programme in June, but we have already decided that no summer sport and no all-season sport will be included. It will only be snow and ice," IOC president Kirsty Coventry told the press.

However, she said such a reform would "potentially lend itself" to Salt Lake City in 2034.

"We should figure out how we want potentially new sports, innovative sports and disciplines to



Bangladesh's captain Najmul Hossain Shanto (right) and his Pakistani counterpart Shan Masood pose with the series trophy at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Dhaka, Bangladesh yesterday on the eve of the first test cricket match between the two countries. - AFP

Italy's tennis chief wants to break Grand Slam 'monopoly' with new major

Tennis

Jérôme Rasetti

ROME - Angelo Binaghi has dragged Italian tennis from the doldrums to a golden age since taking charge of the country's federation (FITP) a quarter of a century ago, with Jannik Sinner just the very best of some of the world's top players.

But the organiser of the Italian Open, which runs in Rome until May 17, has an even bigger goal - breaking what he calls the Grand Slam monopoly and hosting a fifth major tournament in his home nation.

"The monopoly is scandalous and is a big handicap for tennis," Binaghi said in an interview with AFP and the Associated Press.

"It's a scandal that there is no meritocratic system, instead the system protects those who don't do as much as they could for tennis."

"There are four countries in the world that have a mountain of money to invest in tennis that other nations don't have. I'm trying to break that monopoly."

Binaghi insists that Italy is the place to host a fifth Slam given the explosion in popularity of the sport in recent years, pushed by the likes of Sinner and Jasmine Paolini, reigning women's champion here in Rome.

The 65-year-old said he was willing to organise the eventual tournament "anywhere in Italy and on any surface", but he was vague on the practicalities of creating a new Slam.

"Tennis is experiencing the sort of boom that will be difficult to replicate in the future, right at the time when our national

football team is going through a disastrous period," he said.

"That makes our successes all the more important for our country."

Fifth Slam?

Binaghi suggested that his proposed tournament wouldn't be held at the Foro Italico where the Italian Open has blossomed into one of the tennis calendar's most prestigious events.

The centre court in the Italian capital is set to have a retractable roof and an increased capacity of 12,500 by 2028.

But Binaghi said that the area around the grounds, which also houses the Stadio Olimpico where football clubs Roma and Lazio play their home matches, presents challenges for a Grand Slam.

"The existing site poses a number of problems: there is no metro stop, barely any buses, and it's difficult to find taxis," said Binaghi.

"It's the most beautiful place to play tennis in the world, but it generates a mountain of extra costs. Every single structure apart from the centre court, has to be put up and then dismantled, and that weighs on the budget."

"When I took over the FITP, the Italian Open was dead (...) tennis was the tenth or twelfth sport in Italy, we had no money, we had no players, we had nothing."

"It has been a hundred times more difficult to make the Italian Open what it is today than it would be to complete the final step needed to get a Grand Slam. As long as I am in charge, I will try to achieve it... And if we don't succeed, tennis will miss a unique opportunity that no-one else will have for the next 100 years."

- AFP

come onto the programme," she said.

"But we're also under the very big realisation that we can't continue to just get bigger, bigger, bigger. That's not the answer either."

The head of the 2030 Games, Edgar Grosperon, floated the possibility in December of including outdoor disciplines with no snow or ice and with low organisational costs, to better exploit the potential of the French Alps.

"Between 1,000m and 2,500m in altitude, we have all the snow, all the resorts," he said.

"But between zero and 1,000m, there's nothing, even though it's an incredible playground."

"And that's where we're thinking about outdoor sports: trail running, cyclocross, gravel... It would really be a shame not to show that side of things."

- AFP

K-pop stars BTS draw 50,000-strong crowd in Mexico

MEXICO CITY – Around 50,000 fans of K-pop superstars BTS gathered outside Mexico’s National Palace on Wednesday to

get a look at the group, who waved to the crowd from a balcony after meeting with President Claudia Sheinbaum.

BTS will perform shows in Mexico City, with more than 135,000 tickets for the stadium showcase getting snapped up in a

matter of minutes. The first of three shows took place yesterday, with others following tomorrow and on Sunday.

The group returned to the world spotlight in March after an almost four-year pause so its members could carry out their obligatory military service.

Kim Nam-joon, one of the members of the group, said to the crowd in Spanish: “I love you, I adore you. Thank you very much!”

“I already told them they have to come back next year,” Sheinbaum said, later posting a photo with the group and holding their latest

album “ARIRANG.”

Lizeth Zarate, a coordinator for the Zócalo – Mexico City’s main square located in front of the presidential palace – said the Wednesday crowd was around 50,000.

“They’re my whole world,” Estefany Victoriano, a 25-year-old secretary, told AFP.

Another onlooker, 18-year-old Zoe Pérez, was on the verge of tears.

“I’m speechless, and it’s a very beautiful feeling to see them in person. Since I couldn’t get tickets, well, it makes me a little emotional,” she said. – AFP



Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum (fourth from left) poses with the seven members of K-pop group BTS at the Palacio Nacional in Mexico City on Wednesday. Sheinbaum is pictured holding the South Korean band's latest album, “ARIRANG.” – Photo: Mexican Presidency Press Office

Ryanair urges pre-flight morning booze ban

LONDON – Ryanair chief executive Michael O’Leary has urged a ban on serving alcohol in airport bars before morning flights in an effort to tackle drunk and aggressive passengers.

In an interview with *The Times* newspaper published on Wednesday, the boss of the Irish no-frills carrier said the problem was becoming worse.

Ryanair, which flies mainly across Europe, was having to divert almost one aircraft a day because of boozy behaviour by passengers, he pointed out.

“It’s becoming a real challenge for all airlines,” O’Leary said.

“I fail to understand why anybody... is serving people at five or six o’clock in the morning,” he told the newspaper.

O’Leary said alcohol sale-licence exemptions for airport outlets contributed to the situation.

“There should be no alcohol served at airports outside [pub] licensing hours,” he said, while maintaining there should be a limit of two drinks per person across other times, which could be controlled using boarding passes.

“We are reasonably responsible but the ones who are not responsible, the ones who are profiteering off it, are the airports,” he told the daily.

Ryanair last year announced it would fine a passenger 500 euros for unruly behaviour resulting in their removal from an aircraft.

O’Leary told *The Times* that a volatile mix of alcohol and “people shoving powder [drugs] up their nose” was also problematic.

“And the women are as bad offenders as the men in this,” he added.

– AFP

Paris gets taste of Nigeria’s Nollywood

PARIS – Paris got a taste of Nigeria’s film industry on Wednesday with the start of the NollywoodWeek festival, with movies exploring love, family and duty, shorts and documentaries.

Now in its 13th edition, the NOW festival this week showcases films not only from Nigeria’s Nollywood but also Ghanaian, Kenyan and Senegalese productions and filmmakers from the African diaspora.

“With my partners, we came to the realisation that a city like Paris just could not ignore the cultural phenomenon that Nollywood had become,” co-founder Serge Noukoué told AFP about the festival, which began in 2013.

“We just thought it was an opportunity to change the narrative around African film.”

Last year, for the first time a Nollywood movie “My Father’s Shadow” scored an official slot at Cannes, marking another step for an industry long seen as producing a stream of low-budget dramas.

The rise of streaming services and the growing popularity of African music such as Afrobeats and Amapiano has helped expose film culture to new audiences – as well as increasing quality, access and funding.

But producers still struggle to reach outside Africa beyond the diaspora despite making many more films every year than Hollywood. India’s Bollywood is

the largest in terms of numbers produced.

A ‘lab for what’s coming’

The five-day NOW festival, based in the Paris classic arthouse L’Arlequin, showcases films such as “East West Love” a love story between Nigeria and Kenya, and “Evi Superstar”, about a rising Nigerian singer forced to rebuild her career.

“Mothers of Chibok” looks at the impact of the kidnapping of the Chibok girls by jihadists in Nigeria in 2014, while “Batwong Unmasked: An African Superhero” examines the first African superhero in DC Comics universe.

Though streaming has given African film a wider audience and greater revenues, Nollywood is still growing more professional and structured, Noukoué said.

“I think we’re looking at an industry that is ambitious, but that doesn’t necessarily have the means to sustain that ambition at the moment,” he said.

“We are in a place where there are a lot of things that are needed for Nollywood to actually reach its potential.”

NollywoodWeek is a “lab for what’s coming” and to showcase the creativity out of the continent.

Panels this week will look at music rights and AI in film.

“We want to break those boundaries and break those walls,” Noukoué said. “But it’s a lot of work to get to that.” – AFP



Canadian filmmaker James Cameron (left) and his wife US former actress Suzy Amis Cameron attend the premiere of Paramount Pictures’ “Billie Eilish - Hit Me Hard and Soft: The Tour” at Village Theatre in Westwood, California on Wednesday, a 2026 American 3D concert film directed and produced by James Cameron, 71, and US singer-songwriter Billie Eilish, 24. The film stars Eilish and features performances from her seventh headlining concert tour, “Hit Me Hard and Soft: The Tour” (2025), in Manchester. It is Eilish’s third concert film succeeding “Happier Than Ever: A Love Letter to Los Angeles” (2021) and “Billie Eilish: Live at the O2” (2023). – AFP

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 13°C~27°C	Manila 25°C~36°C	New York 12°C~18°C	Lisbon 14°C~20°C
Shanghai 13°C~23°C	Bangkok 25°C~34°C	London 9°C~19°C	Rio de Janeiro 22°C~30°C
Hong Kong 21°C~28°C	Tokyo 15°C~26°C	Frankfurt 7°C~19°C	Luanda 22°C~27°C
Taipei 20°C~26°C	Singapore 25°C~31°C	Vancouver 9°C~17°C	Maputo 15°C~27°C
Guangzhou 21°C~27°C	Kuala Lumpur 24°C~33°C	Paris 10°C~21°C	Dili 23°C~32°C
Nanjing 12°C~24°C	Jakarta 24°C~34°C	Moscow 7°C~17°C	São Tomé 26°C~31°C
Guilin 17°C~25°C	Seoul 9°C~21°C	Las Vegas 21°C~37°C	Praia 20°C~27°C
Xi'an 12°C~23°C	Sydney 10°C~21°C	Monte Carlo 14°C~21°C	Bissau 21°C~37°C



1. Pretty in pink

A floral mannequin is pictured during the 2026 Fleurs de Villes FLORA Bloor-Yorkville event in Toronto, Canada, on Wednesday. Showcasing more than 30 installations created by local floral designers, the event kicked off here on Wednesday and will last until Sunday. — Xinhua

2. No brain freeze

A white lioness cools down with a block of ice during a heat wave with temperatures between 35 and 37 degrees Celsius in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico on Wednesday. — AFP

3. Best mates

Colombian street artist Oscar Giraldo's pets, a cat called Pereza and a rat called Luciana, are seen as they perform with him on a street in Ibague, Tolima department, Colombia on Wednesday. — AFP



4. Water spirit

A visitor walks past "Simbi Siren" by Kenyan artist Wangechi Mutu, during the pre-opening of the 61st Venice Art Biennale in Venice on Wednesday. — AFP

5. First light

The Flatiron building's Beaux-Arts detailing is illuminated for the first time in its 124-year existence, in New York, on Wednesday. The iconic building has undergone an over US\$100 million renovation. — AFP

6. Healing hooves

Warrior Equine Chief Instructor Jim Goddard (right) works with Army veteran Al Strudwick, a former Sergeant who served with the Intelligence Corps of the Army, in an exercise to gain the animal's trust at The Light Cavalry Honourable Artillery Company stables near Windsor, west of London on April 13. Members of the armed forces and the police may put their lives on the line for their country but even they have their mental and physical limits and often it is horses, not humans, who can provide salvation. — AFP

