

# Xi, Trump agree on new vision for bilateral ties



President Xi Jinping (right) shakes hands with US President Donald Trump, who is on a state visit to China, at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. – Xinhua

BEIJING – In a meeting closely watched by the world, President Xi Jinping and his US counterpart Donald Trump yesterday agreed on a new vision of building a constructive bilateral relationship of strategic stability.

The new vision will provide strategic guidance for China-US relations over the next three years and beyond, Xi said when holding talks in Beijing with Trump, who is on a three-day state visit to China concluding today – the first such visit in the past nine years.

Xi defined the nature of “constructive strategic stability” as a positive stability with cooperation as the mainstay, a sound stability with moderate competition, a constant stability with manageable differences, and an enduring stability with promises of peace.

Trump said he will work with Xi to strengthen communication and cooperation, properly handle differences, and make bilateral relations better than ever before.

Both leaders agreed that China-US relations

are the most important bilateral relationship in the world today.

“Looking back at the course of China-US relations, whether or not we could have mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and win-win cooperation is the key to whether the relationship can advance steadily,” Xi said at yesterday’s welcome banquet for Trump.

“We must make it work, and never mess it up,” Xi said, adding that both China and the United States stand to gain from cooperation and lose from confrontation.

## New Impetus for Cooperation

During the two leaders’ formal talks, Xi spoke of the latest round of trade talks between Chinese and US officials, lauding the “generally balanced and positive outcomes.”

“This is good news for the people of the two countries and the world,” he said, calling on the two sides to sustain the good momentum that they have worked hard to create.

The Ministry of Commerce (MOC) said yesterday that China is ready to work with the United States to continuously expand the list of cooperation and shorten the list of problems.

On his trip, Trump is accompanied by top US executives, including Apple’s Tim Cook, Nvidia’s Jensen Huang and Tesla’s Elon Musk, whom he called outstanding representatives from the US business community.

“They all respect and value China. I strongly encourage them to expand cooperation with China,” Trump said. The business leaders said that the successful meeting between Xi and Trump has injected new impetus into bilateral economic and trade cooperation and provided certainty for the world economy.

“China will only open its door wider,” Xi said. American companies are deeply involved in China’s reform and opening up, and the US side is welcome to enhance mutually beneficial cooperation with China, he added.

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## China ready to work with US to expand cooperation: MOC

BEIJING – China is ready to work with the United States to continuously expand the list of cooperation and shorten the list of problems in the spirit of equality, respect and mutual benefit, and promote the healthy, stable and sustainable development of bilateral economic and trade ties, the Ministry of Commerce (MOC) said yesterday.

Ministry spokesperson He Yongqian made the remarks while commenting on the China-US economic and trade consultations held in the Republic of Korea on Wednesday.

Guided by the important common understandings between the two heads of state and in line with the principles of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation, the two sides held candid, in-depth and constructive exchanges on addressing economic and trade issues of mutual concern and further expanding pragmatic cooperation, the spokesperson said.

– Xinhua

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### LT Game showcases 2<sup>nd</sup>-gen AI robot dealer at Asian IR Expo

Macau’s gaming technology company LT Game Limited presented its latest AI-powered robot dealer “Samantha” during the three-day G2E Asia + Asian IR Expo.

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### UK health minister quits ahead of possible challenge to Starmer

Britain’s health minister Wes Streeting announced yesterday that he had resigned, plunging Keir Starmer’s premiership deeper into crisis as potential challengers positioned themselves for a possible leadership challenge.

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### Spain gears up for August 12 total solar eclipse

Spain, one of the few places in the world where a total solar eclipse will be visible in August, has begun preparations for an event it hopes will shift tourism away from the beaches and towards the countryside.

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# Mario Ho highlights 'Sports Plus' vision at Asian IR Expo summit



Local businessman and esports entrepreneur Mario Ho Yau Kwan, co-owner of the US National Basketball Association's (NBA) Boston Celtics, addresses yesterday's "How Sports Are Becoming Platforms of Culture, Tourism & Technology" session during the three-day G2E Asia + Asian IR Expo at The Venetian Macao's Cotai Expo.

— Photo: Khalel Vallo

**Khalel Vallo**

Local businessman and esports entrepreneur Mario Ho Yau Kwan said yesterday that sports have evolved into a powerful platform connecting culture, tourism and technology.

The 31-year-old made the remarks in a keynote speech at the G2E Asia + Asian IR Expo yesterday, as he called for Macau to position itself as a leading sports and entertainment hub in the Asia-Pacific region. The three-day fair ended yesterday.

Ho is a co-owner of the US National Basketball Association's (NBA) Boston Celtics, member of the All-China Youth Federation, member of the Hubei Provincial Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), chairman and co-CEO of NIP (Ninjas in Pyjamas) GROUP INC., and son of late Macau gaming mogul Stanley Ho Hung Sun and Angela Leong On Kei, a tourism and gaming executive and member of the Macau Legislative Assembly (AL)

Speaking at a session titled "How Sports Are Becoming Platforms of Culture, Tourism & Technology", Ho reflected on Macau's transformation over the years from a gaming-focused destination into an integrated tourism and entertainment city. "There's always something special about speaking in Macau, the city where I grew up and where so much of my life has been", Ho said.

Drawing from his experience in esports, live entertainment and professional sports [team] ownership through his role as co-owner and managing partner of the Boston Celtics, Ho introduced what he described as the "Sports Plus" model – a concept combining sports with lifestyle, tourism, and technology.

According to Ho, sports have become "one of the most powerful cross-industry platforms in the world", capable of connecting people across cultures and generations beyond traditional business or political boundaries. He particularly highlighted the rise of esports as a defining force in modern youth culture, noting that fans today seek immersive and socially driven experiences rather than passive entertainment.

"What we see year after year is that our fans don't simply just watch – they belong," Ho said, referring to the global esports communities built through his company (NIP Group).

Ho also described sports as a major driver of tourism and economic activity, pointing to international events such as the FIFA World Cup, the Olympic Games, Formula One races and international esports tournaments as catalysts for hotel occupancy, retail spending and nightlife economies, citing destinations including Singapore, Abu Dhabi, Riyadh and Las Vegas as examples of cities that successfully repositioned themselves through sports and

entertainment investments.

Turning to Macau, Ho said the city already possesses world-class integrated resort (IR) infrastructure, strong hospitality foundations and strategic positioning within the Greater Bay Area (GBA). However, he stressed the need for diversification beyond traditional gaming. "International sporting events, professional esports arenas, immersive large-scale entertainment experiences together could define the next chapter of Macau's identity", Ho said, adding that Macau has the potential to become "the sports and entertainment capital of the Asia-Pacific".

Technology was another key focus of his speech. Ho said advancements such as AI, big data, VR (virtual reality) and AR (augmented reality) are transforming sports through athlete performance tracking, fan engagement and personalised digital content.

Looking ahead, Ho envisioned future integrated resorts evolving into "true industrial platforms" that combine professional sports arenas, esports studios, cultural spaces and innovation hubs within interconnected entertainment ecosystems. He concluded his speech by calling for stronger collaboration among governments, investors, technology companies, sports organisations and integrated resort operators to develop a "sports plus culture, tourism and technology ecosystem" across the Asia-Pacific region. ■

## LT Game showcases 2<sup>nd</sup>-gen AI robot dealer at Asian IR Expo

**Khalel Vallo**

Macau-based gaming technology company LT Game Limited\* presented its latest AI-powered robot dealer "Samantha" during the three-day G2E Asia + Asian IR Expo, which ended yesterday, with company representatives telling the *Post* that the second-generation prototype has attracted interest from overseas markets including South Korea and Europe.

The humanoid robot dealer was showcased at LT Game's booth during the gaming and integrated resort exhibition held at The Venetian Macao's Cotai Expo, where visitors gathered to observe demonstrations of the AI-assisted gaming system.

According to LT Game's brochure on Samantha, the robot features adjustable ultra-fast rounds, which freely adjusts game speed and offers an 18-second ultra-fast round option. It also features a "high

excitement and high throughput", keeping players engaged and revenues moving steadily.

Speaking to the *Post* yesterday, LT Game IT Director David So said the company was currently focusing on refining the technology and exploring international market demand rather than introducing the product to Macau's gaming industry right away. "We plan to sell it, but different markets have different needs", So said, adding that the company has already received significant interest from overseas buyers following the exhibition, particularly from South Korea and several European countries.

So elaborated that the current version of "Samantha" represents the company's second-generation robotic dealer system, following an earlier prototype developed around 10 to 15 years ago. "The first generation was more like a robotic arm", he said, noting that

high production costs during the earlier development stage limited the practicality of the technology at the time, making it mainly useful for promotional purposes.

"Back then, the price was really high, so it didn't really make sense commercially", So said. However, advances in robotics and AI technology over the past decade have significantly lowered costs and improved functionality, allowing the company to revisit the concept with a more advanced system, he said. He did not elaborate.

The latest generation features a full humanoid-style robotic setup with smoother and more human-like movements, alongside expanded software and backend integration capabilities, So said, adding: "Not only are the movements smoother and more human-like, but there are also a lot of backend applications, AI functions and application programming interfaces (APIs) integrated into it," So noted.

Unlike the previous version, which was limited to handling baccarat, the new system has been designed with flexibility in mind, allowing developers to deploy different gaming skill sets depending on operational needs, So said. "If you want the robot to handle other games, you just need to implement another skill set", So stressed.

Despite the public demonstrations, So clarified that the robot dealer is still in the prototype and testing stage, with the company continuing to fine-tune both the



LT Game's AI-powered robot dealer "Samantha" deals cards during the three-day G2E Asia + Asian IR Expo at The Venetian Macao's Cotai Expo yesterday.

— Photo: Khalel Vallo

hardware and software systems. "We're not selling it officially at the moment", So said, adding: "We're still testing the technology and trying to make the overall system more complete".

When asked about a potential commercial release timeline, So said future deployment would depend largely on market demand and decisions made by the company's sales team. "It depends on customer needs and the market", he said.

The robotic dealer was among several AI and automation-focused technologies presented during this year's Asian IR Expo and G2E Asia, aiming to reflect growing industry interest in smart gaming systems, automation and integrated resort technology solutions.

According to analysts, gaming technology companies continue exploring AI-assisted operations and automation, LT Game's "Samantha" robot highlighted how robotics could play an increasing role in overseas gaming markets, even as the company continues refining the technology before any large-scale commercial rollout. ■

\* LT Game, a subsidiary of Paradise Entertainment Limited, is one of the major gaming products and casino solutions providers in Macau and in the world, as well as Asia's largest manufacturer of live gaming equipment. Paradise Entertainment Limited (HKEx: 1180) is a Hong Kong-listed investment holding company primarily focused on the Macau gaming market. — Gemini

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SOUTHWESTERLY WINDS WITH  
GUSTS.  
RELATIVE HUMIDITY  
WILL RANGE BETWEEN  
80% AND 99%.**



**23°C~26°C**

Source: SMG

## LRT passengers rise 79 pct in 2025

**Tony Wong**

The Light Rapid Transit (LRT) recorded a total of 9.62 million passengers in 2025, an increase of 79 percent from 2024, according to the LRT operator's 2025 annual report published on its website on Wednesday.

This represented a daily average of 26,356 passengers last year.

In comparison, Macau recorded 231 million public bus passengers in 2025, or a daily average of 636,000, an increase of 1.81 percent from 2024, according to official statistics.

The LRT 2025 annual report notes that the LRT recorded a daily average of 30,600 passengers in September last year, breaking the 30,000 benchmark for the first time since passengers started having to pay in early 2020.

The LRT recorded a daily average of 33,000 passengers in December 2019 when the system started operating.

According to the LRT website, the system recorded a daily average of 33,100 passengers in February this year, the highest since the system's operational start.

The LRT 2025 annual report also notes that Hengqin Station had

the highest number of passengers last year.

### Govt financial support makes up 87.5 pct of total receipts

The annual report also said that the LRT operator recorded a total revenue of 686,554,234 patacas in 2025, a decrease of 11 percent from 2024. According to the report, the drop was primarily due to a decline in financial support from the government.

According to the report, ticket revenues rose 56 percent year on year to 43,206,358 patacas in 2025.

Despite a significant increase in ticket revenues, government financial support still accounted for 87.5 percent of the LRT operator's total revenues last year.

The LRT operator is known as MLM in short.

The annual report said that the LRT operator recorded a total expenditure of 643,542,486 patacas in 2025, a decrease of 14 percent from 2024. According to the report, the drop was primarily due to the fact that the system was fully operated by MLM in 2025, a change from previously when the operation was outsourced to Hong Kong's MTR. ■



A man is waiting for the approaching LRT train at Lotus Station in Cotai last week. Lotus Station is a station of both the Taipa Line and the Hengqin Line, serving as an interchange enabling passengers to transfer between the two lines. – Photo: Tony Wong

## 89 pct of hypertension patients get treatment: Health Bureau

**Armindo Neves**

Health Bureau (SSM) Community Health Care Department Chief Wong In announced yesterday that around 89 percent of the bureau's registered high blood pressure patients were receiving treatment last year.

Wong revealed the figures in a speech during a press conference held at the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre (CHSCJ) complex.

Yesterday's press conference was attended by the bureau's Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC) Health Promotion Division physician Wong Chi Leong and CHSCJ Cardiology Service physician Chang Tou.

According to Wong In, in 2024 about 148,000 residents aged 18 and above were living with hypertension. Of these, 107,000 were registered in the chronic disease database, yielding an awareness rate of 72.2 percent, Wong said, adding that among the patients registered with the bureau, the treatment rate was 89.6 percent while the hypertension control rate\* stood at 62.6 percent.

In order to enable residents to "know where to measure, measure conveniently, and remember to measure," Dr Wong Chi Leong said that the bureau has partnered with multiple organisations to establish blood pressure measurement points at 337 locations across Macau. Among these, 146 are self-service blood pressure check stations, he said.

He highlighted that hypertension is known as a silent killer and is a



Health Bureau (SSM) Community Health Care Department Chief Wong In (centre), Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC) Health Promotion Division physician Wong Chi Leong (right) and Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre (CHSCJ) Cardiology Service physician Chang Tou look on during yesterday press conference. – Photo: Armindo Neves

chronic disease of major concern in Macau. In its early stages, it often presents no symptoms, yet it can cause damage to organs such as the heart, brain, and kidneys. Early detection, timely treatment, and effective control are essential, Dr Wong Chi Leong said.

He suggested residents use the "My Health" function within the "Macao One Account" to record their blood pressure and monitor changes over time.

Dr Chang also emphasised that "having normal blood pressure does not mean hypertension is cured." Patients should take their medication on time and must not stop without medical advice, he said. Antihypertensive drugs do not harm the kidneys; it is not taking them that

causes real damage to kidney health, according to Dr Chang.

Hypertension is most dangerous when it presents no symptoms, Dr Chang said, adding that these medications are not addictive. He pointed out that regular medication is necessary in both summer and winter.

Dr Chang urged residents to make use of regular follow-up services at community health centres and to treat blood pressure management as a "marathon." ■

\*The hypertension control rate refers to the percentage of people with hypertension whose blood pressure is successfully maintained below a specific target level (usually <140/90 mmHg) through treatment or lifestyle changes. – Gemini

## 2 consecutive CCM performances to blend intangible cultural heritage

**Rui Pastorin**

Two performances incorporating tradition alongside modern expressions are consecutively taking place at the Macau Cultural Centre (CCM) as part of the 36th Macau Arts Festival, with each respective group meeting with media yesterday at CCM to talk more about their upcoming shows.

The first performance, "The Starry Night – The Musical", comes to Macau for the first time following its Hong Kong debut last year, taking place tonight and tomorrow at the Grand Auditorium.

Held in Cantonese with English subtitles, the around 1 hour and 40-minute show is produced by Hong Kong's "Actors' Company", with Mandy Yiu (姚潤敏) as executive director and starring Angela Lam (林可嘉), who is also a dancer and the show's choreographer, and Hong Kong singer-actor Hubert Wu (胡鴻鈞).

The show incorporates two forms of intangible cultural heritage: shiwan ceramic artistry and Cantonese opera, as noted yesterday, with a story that also explores themes of family, love and cultural identity.

On balancing culture and entertainment, Yiu highlighted that the best entertainment is about culture. Arts and culture are the accumulation of one's life, she said. No matter what type of show, the content of an art piece can always be linked to one's daily lives, she noted, adding that entertainment is

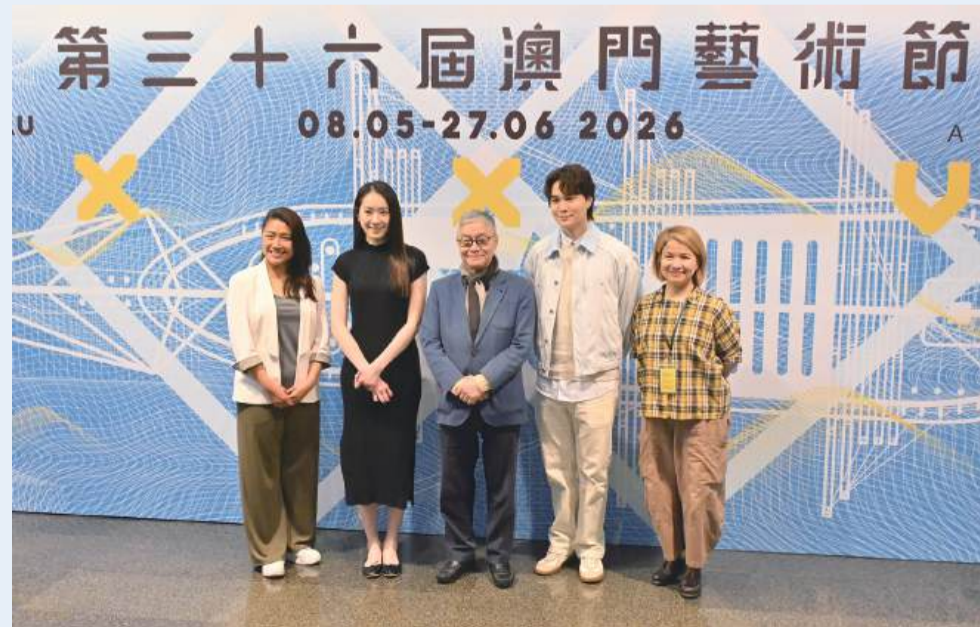
all about what we are trying to transmit to the audience and enjoy the entire show.

Both Wu and Lam also talked about their experiences and preparation for the show. Wu, in particular, noted that he enjoyed the experience and camaraderie while also being challenging, highlighting it as a chance to grow and find his potential in certain areas.

A following session was held for the

70-minute "1014 – Nanyin x Jazz", which blends jazz and Cantonese nanyin, a form of narrative singing, with performances set at CCM's Small Auditorium this weekend.

The meet-the-media-session featured director Tang Shu-wing and performers Franco Yuen Siu-fai, a Cantonese Opera veteran, and singer-songwriter/actress Ashley Lin (林愷鈴), who noted that this was her first musical role.



"The Starry Night – The Musical" performer and choreographer Angela Lam (from left to right), "1014 – Nanyin x Jazz" performers Ashley Lin and Franco Yuen Siu-fai, "The Starry Night – The Musical" performer Hubert Wu and executive director Mandy Yiu pose during the meet-the-media-session at the Macau Cultural Centre (CCM) yesterday. – Photo: Rui Pastorin

Tang said that the show launched in 2024 during the Hong Kong Performing Arts Expo, with its title derived from the first show date, October 14. But Tang and the two performers underlined that audiences will find a deeper meaning behind the numbers.

Its story follows a couple who goes through a procedure using a chip that erases a painful memory with a happy one, tackling topics of technology, whether it can manipulate emotions, and if superficial happiness can hide deeper human emotions. Tang emphasised that with its incorporation of jazz and nanyin, the performance is not a traditional musical piece, while its story also encourages people to think about daily life and their emotions.

Yuen also said that the show could be a good way to pass down the knowledge of the cultural heritage craft to the modern generation, while Lin said it strikes a balance between the two art forms, highlighting fusion instead of showcasing them into different parts.

One can find more details, including ticketing, on [icm.gov.mo/fam/36/](http://icm.gov.mo/fam/36/) ■

\*Nanyin, according to Gemini, integrates ancient vocal melodies with a specific ensemble of wind and string instruments, characterised by its slow, elegant tempo and preservation of linguistic and musical features dating back to the Han and Tang dynasties.

# Bacalhau, sea otters star in Vanda Chan's solo exhibition

**Rui Pastorin**

Bacalhau (codfish), along with sea otters on a quest towards its discovery, are taking up an exhibition room at the 10 Fantasia gallery via paintings by Macau illustrator and designer Vanda Chan's (陳家欣) "Bacalhau" solo exhibition.

On until June 30, the free-admission exhibition in room A of the gallery on Calçada da Igreja de S. Lázaro (瘋堂斜巷) starts with a story told through a line of seven paintings that exhibitiongoers will first encounter starring an adventurous group of sea otters. According to a statement at the venue, these works, each accompanied by nursery rhymes and poetry, are from a chapter of "Otter Kingdom", a picture-book that Chan hopes to someday publish.

The otters are in search of the "Cod King" and the origins of bacalhau, Portugal's signature dish, that has also found a home in Macau in local cuisine, with the exhibition statement pointing out that bacalhau has formed a "cross-ocean connection between Portugal and Macau".

It is used in a variety of delicacies from codfish balls to Bacalhau à Brás ("Brás Style Cod"), all the way to its tinned form, with Chan also portraying some of them in a section of the exhibition. With a playful take on the story and history of bacalhau, the statement from the gallery noted: "Today, cod might be seen as just a delicacy on our tables. However, in times of scarcity, it was a vital pillar of human survival. Adventurers during the Age of Discovery\* learnt the art of salt-curing, much like the otters in our story, 'locking' the essence of the ocean within the fish to carry it back to their distant homes".

The artist is currently a freelance illustrator in Macau and a children's art instructor. She has collaborated with local commercial organisations on various projects, including MGM COTAI and power utility CEM, the statement noted. The exhibition marks Chan's third food-themed exhibition, according to information at the gallery, and uses food as her main creative inspiration. With this in mind, the artist hopes to further explore food from around the world as a theme, aiming to use her works "to share the joy that food brings to viewers".

Members of the public may view the works from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. from Tuesday to Sunday.  
*\*The Age of Discovery – aka the Age of Exploration or Age of Encounter – was a period from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> century when European explorers travelled across the globe by sea to map new territories, establish trade routes, and connect previously isolated continents. - Gemini*



Photos Rui Pastorin

## Motorcyclist arrested for breaking police wheel lock



This undated handout photo released by the Public Security Police (PSP) yesterday shows two police officers escorting the Nepalese suspect to a police station near Toi San district in the north of the peninsula.

Tony Wong

A local man in his fifties was arrested this week after allegedly breaking a police wheel lock with his bare hands and fleeing with his impounded motorcycle.

The suspect, a construction worker surnamed Chao, was apprehended at his home after traffic police discovered that both the vehicle and the lock had vanished from a parking space in Nam Van.

Public Security Police (PSP) spokesman Wong Chi Weng told a regular press conference yesterday that the incident began on Monday morning. Traffic officers patrolling metered spaces on Avenida Doutor Mário Soares noticed Chao's motorcycle was parked at an expired parking meter.

A further records check revealed the vehicle's annual licence fee had not been paid. Officers subsequently affixed warning notices to the handlebars and seat before immobilising the bike with a wheel lock.

When officers returned on Tuesday afternoon to tow the vehicle, the space was empty. The police identified Chao via the vehicle registration system and tracked him to his residence in the Avenida de Horta e Costa neighbourhood that evening.

Under questioning, Wong said, Chao admitted to removing the lock. He claimed that when he found his motorcycle immobilised on Monday afternoon, he mistakenly believed it was solely due to the unpaid parking fee. He told police he broke the lock off with his bare hands and rode away, saying he intended to return the device when he eventually paid the fine.

The police recovered the wheel lock from an electricity meter box in Chao's residential building. While the device was found to be slightly "deformed," an examination suggested no tools had been used to force it open, Wong said.

Chao has been referred to the Public Prosecutions Office



Public Security Police (PSP) spokesman Wong Chi Weng speaks during yesterday's regular press conference. — Photo: Tony Wong

(MP). He faces charges of theft, disobedience, and the destruction of objects under public control. He has also been fined for the original tax and parking violations.

### Security guard arrested for punching shop lamp

In a separate case, according to the PSP spokesman, a Nepalese security guard in his twenties was arrested this week for damaging a shop fitting while in a "bad mood."

The incident occurred in the early hours of April 26 outside a dessert shop on Rua de Marques de Oliveira in the San Kio district. The shop owner reported the damage to the police after CCTV footage showed a passer-by punching a hanging lamp outside the premises. The owner estimated the damage at 3,400 patacas, Wong said.

Using the citywide CCTV network, the police identified the suspect as a non-resident worker (NRW) surnamed Gurung. He was summoned for questioning on Tuesday.

Gurung confessed to the act, telling the police he was frustrated and had been drinking at the time. He has been transferred to the MP on a charge of causing property damage, Wong said. ■

## Gongbei Customs seizes 25 aquarium fish at HZMB

Armindo Neves

Gongbei Customs announced in a statement yesterday that its officers seized 25 ornamental fish at the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) Zhuhai checkpoint on April 8.

According to the statement, on that day, while conducting routine supervision at the mega bridge's Zhuhai checkpoint, customs officers noticed a driver of a Guangdong-Macao dual plate vehicle who appeared to be visibly nervous.

When intercepting the driver for inspection, the officers found two black insulated bags, one in the driver's side footwell and the other in the front passenger's footwell.

Inside the bags were many plastic bags that had been filled with water and each contained a live ornamental fish, totalling 25 fish, the statement said.

The driver admitted to smuggling the fish on behalf of "someone" in exchange for a "transport fee." Subsequent identification by the Gongbei Customs Technical Centre confirmed that the ornamental fish were all saltwater species, comprising eight different species, including red firefish and emperor angelfish.

In the statement, Gongbei Customs reminded the public that, in accordance with laws and regulations, bringing live animals and plants into the Chinese mainland without approval is prohibited. Those who violate these provisions will be held legally responsible by the authorities.

### Macau Customs seizes 4.9 tonnes of frozen beef tripe and chicken feet worth 88,000 patacas

Macau Customs Service officers raided three parallel-trading dens in the peninsula's northern district on



This undated handout photo provided by Gongbei Customs yesterday shows plastic bags filled with water and each containing a live ornamental fish, seized by its officers at the HZMB Zhuhai Port (checkpoint) on April 8.



This handout photo released by the Macau Customs Service on Wednesday shows the seized frozen chicken feet stored at room temperature at a parallel trading den in the peninsula's northern district on Tuesday.

Tuesday where they seized 4,900 kilograms of frozen beef tripe and chicken feet worth 88,000 patacas in total.

According to a statement on Wednesday, the officers caught three male residents aged between 18 and 59 who ran the dens and hired parallel traders to smuggle frozen beef tripe and chicken feet from Macau to the mainland.

The trio each face a fine in compliance with the relevant provisions listed in the External Trade Law, the statement said.

Moreover, the statement added, the trio violated the Food Safety Law as the supposedly frozen beef tripe and chicken feet were stored merely at room temperature, adding that the Customs Service has meanwhile transferred the case to the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) for follow-up action.

Meanwhile, as the business premises in question did not possess a valid operating licence, the case has been referred to the Financial Services Bureau (DSF) for follow-up. ■

## China to expand services opening-up, deepen int'l cooperation

Analysis

BEIJING – China will further expand opening-up in the services sector and broaden development opportunities through international cooperation as the industry becomes an increasingly important focus of the country's high-quality development, according to experts.

To spur the services sector to new heights, China needs to open its doors wider, bringing in advanced experience while going global to showcase the "Chinese Services" brand for mutual benefits, noted Li Chunfang, an official with the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), during the latest episode of China Economic Roundtable, an all-media talk show hosted by Xinhua News Agency.

As foreign investment restrictions in China's manufacturing sector have been fully removed, the services sector has become a key

focus of China's high-level opening-up. In the January-February period, actual foreign investment in China's services sector accounted for 68.9 percent of the country's total foreign investment, official data showed.

Liu Tao, deputy director of the Institute of Market Economy at the Development Research Center of the State Council, noted that China's policy efforts in the services sector have mainly focused on three areas: further easing foreign investment access, expanding opening-up platforms, and deepening opening-up in key sectors.

China has dynamically updated its negative list for foreign investment access, with reducing special management measures in the services sector as a major priority. It has also formulated and released a negative list for cross-border trade in services.

The country has also expanded

platforms for services opening-up. So far, the number of comprehensive pilot areas for expanding the opening-up of the services sector has reached 20.

In key sectors, China has piloted the removal of foreign ownership limits in some value-added telecommunications services and allowed trials for the establishment of wholly foreign-owned hospitals.

Looking ahead, China will further expand opening-up trials in areas such as value-added telecommunications and wholly foreign-owned hospitals. It will also improve the negative-list management system for cross-border trade in services, strengthen compliance assessment services for cross-border data flows, enhance services trade cooperation with key countries, and promote exports of cultural and tourism services, according to Liu. — Xinhua

# Xi holds welcome banquet for Trump



President Xi Jinping (left) and US President Donald Trump get ready to shake hands at a state banquet at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. — AFP

BEIJING – President Xi Jinping yesterday held a banquet at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing to welcome US President Donald Trump on his state visit to China.

Addressing the banquet, Xi said the China-US relationship is the most important bilateral relationship in the current world.

“We must make it work, and never mess it up,” Xi said, adding that both China and the United States stand to gain from cooperation and lose from confrontation.

“Our two countries should be partners rather than rivals,” he added.

Xi also said that the two sides agreed to build a constructive China-US relationship of strategic stability to promote the steady, sound, and sustainable development of China-US relations, and bring more peace, prosperity and progress to the world.

“Looking back at the course of China-US relations, whether or not we could have mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and win-win cooperation is the key to whether the relationship can advance steadily,” Xi said.

Noting that China-US relations concern the well-being of the over 1.7 billion people of both countries

and affect the interests of the over 8.0 billion people of the world, Xi said both sides should rise up to this historical responsibility and steer the giant ship of China-US relations forward steadily and in the right direction.

In his remarks at the banquet, Trump said the two sides had positive and constructive conversations.

Noting that the US-China relationship is the most consequential bilateral relationship in the world, Trump said the two countries should strengthen cooperation to create a better future for the world. — Xinhua

# Xi, Trump agree on new vision for bilateral ties

Continued from p.1

## VIBES OF FRIENDSHIP AND RESPECT

Prior to yesterday’s talks, Xi hosted a welcome ceremony for Trump outside the Great Hall of the People in central Beijing, featuring military band performances, a 21-gun salute and a march-past of the guard of honor.

Trump said that it was a great honor to visit China, hailing the very good relationship between the two countries.

Trump said he and Xi have enjoyed friendly communication and worked out many important issues, calling Xi “a great leader” and China “a great country,” and expressing tremendous respect for Xi and the Chinese people.

After the talks, the two leaders visited the Temple of Heaven. Impressed by the more than 600-year-old UNESCO World Heritage Site, Trump said that as great nations with wise and great peoples, the United States and China should deepen mutual understanding and strengthen friendship between their peoples.

Addressing the welcome banquet, Xi recalled the China-US Ping-Pong Diplomacy 55 years ago. Active engagement between the two sides has continued to serve as an important driving force behind the development of bilateral relations. “President Trump and I have had multiple meetings and phone calls and kept China-US relations generally stable,” Xi said.

Trump thanked Xi for the gracious reception and hailed the positive and constructive conversations between

the two sides. “Today is a fantastic day,” he said.

## BRIGHT FUTURE FOR BILATERAL RELATIONS AND HUMANITY

During their talks, the two presidents also exchanged views on major international and regional issues, such as the Middle East situation, the Ukraine crisis, and the Korean Peninsula situation.

Chinese geopolitical experts say that if the proposed constructive relationship of strategic stability can be established and well-preserved, China and the United States will surely contribute a lot to global peace and development for quite a long period to come.

Now it’s up to the United States to work with China in the same direction, given Beijing’s consistent and clear policy on China-US relations, said Diao Daming, vice dean of the National Academy of Development and Strategy of Renmin University of China.

Xi has stressed that the building of such a relationship should not be a mere slogan, but concrete action taken by both sides toward the same goal.

Placing emphasis on the Taiwan question, Xi described it as the most important issue in China-US relations.

If it is handled properly, the bilateral relationship will enjoy overall stability. Otherwise, the two countries will have clashes and even conflicts, putting the entire relationship in great jeopardy, Xi told his American counterpart. — (More on pages 6 to 8) — Xinhua, MPD

# Xi, Trump visit Temple of Heaven

BEIJING – President Xi Jinping and US President Donald Trump visited the Temple of Heaven yesterday in Beijing.

Xi greeted Trump outside the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests. The leaders had a photo taken in front of the Hall and took a tour of the Hall.

During their visit, Xi explained to Trump that in ancient times, state rituals were held at the Temple of Heaven, where then Chinese rulers prayed for national prosperity, social harmony, and favorable weather for good harvests.

“It reflects the traditional Chinese concept that the people are the foundation of a state and only when the foundation is solid will the state be stable,” Xi said.

The Communist Party of China (CPC) has inherited and carried forward this people-centered philosophy rooted in the Chinese civilization, Xi said.

By upholding its fundamental commitment to serving the people wholeheartedly, the Party has earned the firm support of the Chinese people, he added.

Trump said he was impressed by the more than 600-year-old Temple of Heaven. He said the United States and China are both great countries, and that both peoples are wise and great.

He added that the two countries should deepen mutual understanding and strengthen friendship between their peoples. — Xinhua



President Xi Jinping (right) and US President Donald Trump have a photo taken in front of the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests while visiting the monument yesterday. — Xinhua

# Premier Li meets US business community reps

BEIJING – Premier Li Qiang yesterday met here with representatives of the US business community accompanying President Donald Trump on his visit to China.

The talks between President Xi Jinping and President Trump yesterday morning have set a strategic direction for China-US relations, Li noted.

Amid rising global instability and uncertainty, he said, maintaining candid and open communication as well as a stable and sound China-US relationship is not only significant for both countries but also essential for global peace and development.

China stands ready to work with the United States to implement the important consensus reached by the two heads of state and strive for more tangible results to benefit both peoples and the world, the premier said.

“A steadily growing Chinese economy will provide more opportunities for companies from all countries, including US enterprises,” he told the representatives.

Noting that China is implementing its 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan (2026-2030), Li said that the scale, growth potential, and stability of the Chinese market remain evident, with new demand being unleashed at a faster pace, new drivers of growth constantly

strengthening, and the economy continuing to improve steadily.

He pledged that China will stay committed to expanding high-standard opening up, provide quality services to foreign-funded enterprises, improve policies and efficiency, listen to their concerns, help solve their difficulties, and enable them to plan and grow with confidence.

“A stable and open policy environment is the long-standing and unwavering commitment of the Chinese government,” said Li, who expressed hope that more US companies will continue to deepen their engagement in the Chinese market and facilitate communication between the two nations.

Representatives of the US business community said that the successful meeting between the two heads of state has injected new impetus into bilateral economic and trade cooperation and provided certainty for the world economy.

Speaking highly of China’s efforts to advance high-standard opening up and build a world-class business environment, they said the US business community is optimistic about China’s development prospects and willing to expand cooperation with China. — Xinhua

# Xi holds talks with Trump in Beijing



US President Donald Trump (right) shakes hands with President Xi Jinping at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. – Xinhua

President Xi Jinping (seventh from left) holds talks with US President Donald Trump (sixth from right), who is on a state visit to China, at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. – Xinhua

BEIJING – President Xi Jinping held talks with visiting US President Donald Trump at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday.

Transformation not seen in a century is accelerating across the globe, and the international situation is fluid and turbulent, said Xi.

“Can China and the United States overcome the Thucydides Trap and create a new paradigm of major-country relations? Can we meet global challenges together and provide greater stability for the world? Can we build a bright future together for our bilateral relations in the interest of the well-being of the two peoples and the future of humanity? These are the questions vital to history, to the world and to the people,” said Xi.

They are the questions of the times that the leaders of major countries need to answer together, he added.

“I look forward to working together with you to set the course and steer the giant ship of China-US relations, so as to make 2026 a historic, landmark year that opens up a new chapter in China-US relations,” he said.

“I have agreed with President Trump on a new vision of building a constructive China-US relationship of strategic stability,” Xi said.

The new vision will provide strategic guidance for bilateral relations over the next three years and beyond, and should be welcomed by the people of both countries as well as the international community, he said.

The “constructive strategic stability” should be a positive stability with cooperation as the mainstay, a sound stability with moderate competition, a constant stability with manageable differences, and an enduring stability with promises of peace, Xi said.

The building of a constructive China-US relationship of strategic stability should not be a mere slogan, but concrete action taken by both sides toward the same goal, he added.

China-US economic ties are mutually beneficial and win-win in nature, said Xi. “Where disagreements and frictions exist, equal-footed consultation is the only right choice,” he said.

Xi revealed that the economic and trade teams of the two countries produced “generally balanced and positive outcomes” in the latest round of bilateral trade talks yesterday.

“This is good news for the people of the two countries and the world,” he said, calling on the two sides to sustain the good momentum that they have worked hard to create.

Noting that China will only open its door wider, Xi said American companies are deeply involved in China’s reform and opening up, and the US side is welcome to enhance mutually beneficial cooperation.

“The two sides should implement the important consensus we have reached, and make better use of communication channels in the political, diplomatic and military-to-military fields,” Xi said.

The two countries should also expand exchanges and cooperation in areas such as the economy and trade, health, agriculture, tourism, people-to-people ties and law enforcement, he added.

Regarding the Taiwan question, Xi stressed that it is the most important issue in China-US relations.

If it is handled properly, the bilateral relationship will enjoy overall stability. Otherwise, the two countries will have clashes and even conflicts, putting the entire relationship in great jeopardy, Xi said, urging the US side to exercise extra caution in handling the Taiwan question.

Safeguarding cross-strait peace and stability is the biggest common denominator between China and the United States, Xi said, emphasizing that “Taiwan independence” and

cross-strait peace are as irreconcilable as fire and water.

Trump said it was a great honor to pay a state visit to China, calling Xi a great leader and China a great country. “I have tremendous respect for President Xi and the Chinese people,” Trump said.

Trump expressed his willingness to work with Xi to strengthen communication and cooperation, properly handle differences, make bilateral relations better than ever before and embrace a fantastic future.

The United States and China are the most important and most powerful countries in the world, and the two presidents can “do a lot of big and good things for the two countries and the world,” he said.

Trump encouraged representatives of the US business community to expand cooperation with China.

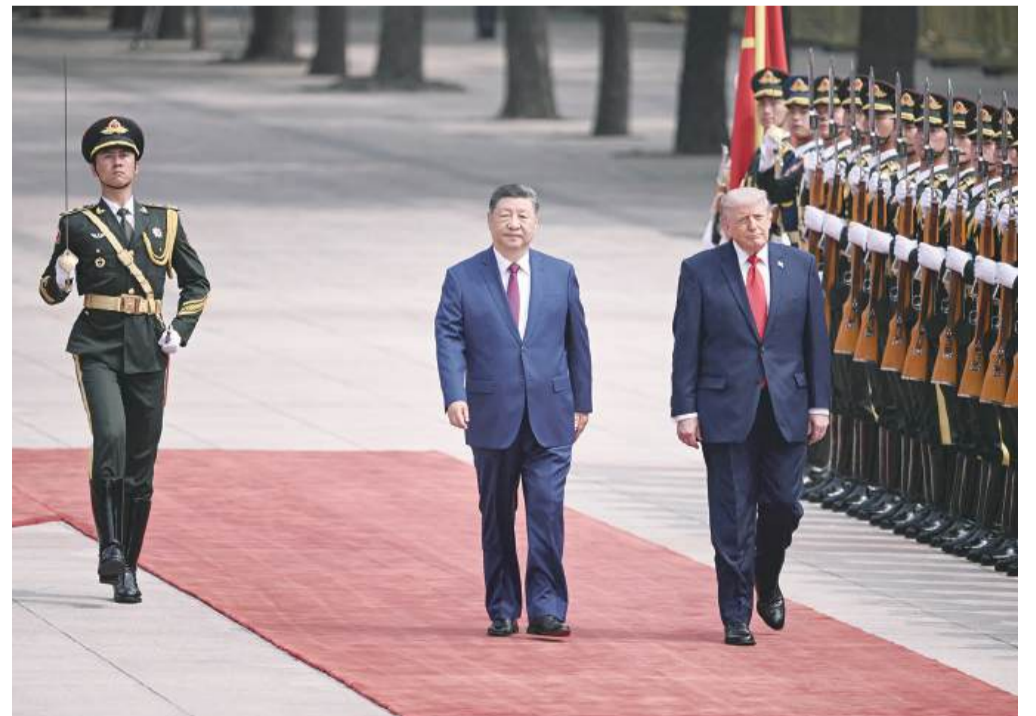
The two presidents exchanged views on major international and regional issues, such as the Middle East situation, the Ukraine crisis, and the Korean Peninsula.

They also agreed to support each other in hosting a successful APEC Economic Leaders’ Meeting and G20 Summit this year.

– Xinhua



US President Donald Trump (right) and President Xi Jinping (left) greet children waving national and US national flags and flowers during a welcome ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. – AFP



US President Donald Trump (right) and President Xi Jinping (centre) inspect a guard of honour during a welcome ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. – AFP

# Only cooperation with China serves US interests

Commentary by Zhu Feng\*

BEIJING – US President Donald Trump's visit to China, and head-of-state meetings, are drawing a lot of attention at a time when the world is seeing conflicts in Ukraine and the Strait of Hormuz. A key task for both Beijing and Washington is to sustain a stable, manageable and enduring bilateral relationship.

Although geopolitical experts often refer to the "Thucydides Trap" theory – a phenomenon whereby a rising power can cause fear in an established power, escalating to war – to interpret Sino-US relations, China has taken a different approach.

This is evident in the strategies it employed to counter the tariff war initiated by Washington last year, and its vision of building a community with a shared future for humanity, which is supported by four global initiatives and guided by principles of mutual respect and win-win cooperation.

This approach has worked, producing steady, positive outcomes in bilateral interactions, while acting as a stabilizing force in a turbulent, ever-changing world.

In this context, Washington should take advantage of the opportunity for dialogue presented by the US leader's visit, to seek closer cooperation with China.

While some in the US who view China as their greatest "strategic competitor" and seek to contain it have done little to conceal their intentions, the broader trend of China-US exchanges and collaboration remains unstopplable.

This disconnect on the US side needs to be addressed with an objective understanding of Beijing.

After the US Supreme Court ruled in February that the US administration's imposition of reciprocal tariffs on trading partners under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act was illegal, the US side levied an additional 10 percent import surcharge on all trading partners under Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974.

The US also introduced a series of negative measures concerning China, including the Section 301 investigations, aimed at undermining China's production capacity advantages and reducing dependence on Chinese industry and supply chains.

However, Washington should have been aware that, given China's 35 percent share of global industrial output, a rapid and complete decoupling is unattainable.

Although the US administration is trying to keep a relatively low profile on the Taiwan question and disputes in the South China Sea, its arms sales to the Chinese island in late 2025 were the largest since 1979.

Additionally, joint military exercises with the Philippines and other external forces in the South China Sea have significantly increased in frequency.

The US should not treat softened rhetoric as a short-term, tactical measure to stabilize bilateral relations.

A US-led rare earths supply alliance designed to reduce dependence on China's rare earths is closely tied to technological innovation and access to critical resources. The same is true of Washington's ambition to revitalize and expand its manufacturing sector.

However, the path to "make America great again" is not necessarily contradictory to China's great rejuvenation. China's significant growth potential, as revealed in its 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan (2026-30), can offer US enterprises many opportunities to cooperate with their Chinese counterparts.

For China-US relations to continue providing mutual economic benefits, fostering exchanges across various social sectors, and enhancing complementary security through normal engagement and cooperation, the US side needs to foster a correct perception of China within its broader strategic framework.

Despite some challenges, Sino-US relations have remained generally stable, thanks to head-of-state diplomacy, with the two leaders maintaining frequent communication and dialogue, and recalibrating the direction of ties at critical junctures.

As the Chinese side has repeatedly emphasized, China and the US need to enable each other's success as interests converge, and to pursue mutually beneficial cooperation.

Both China and the US should make mutual respect the cornerstone, peaceful coexistence the principle and win-win cooperation the goal.

This approach will help the two countries explore the appropriate way to interact, jointly contributing to global peace and stability.

China will never follow the obsolete model of a country seeking hegemony when growing stronger. It will instead remain committed to peaceful development.

Beijing hopes that Washington can respect China's core interests and work together to properly manage differences.

In a world facing increasing turmoil, a stable China-US relationship not only serves the fundamental interests of both nations but also aligns with the widespread expectations of the international community.

*\*The author is the dean and a professor of the School of International Studies, Nanjing University.*

– Courtesy of China Daily

# Sino-US meeting with global implications

Commentary by Marcus Vinicius de Freitas

US President Donald Trump's visit to China and his meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping will inevitably generate headlines centered on tariffs, trade balances, semiconductors, technological contention, and the question of strategic competition between Washington and Beijing.

Yet interpreting this encounter solely through the prism of bilateral tensions would be to misunderstand its deeper historical significance.

What is truly at stake is not merely the future of Sino-US relations, but the gradual emergence of a different understanding of the international order itself.

This is not a meeting between two big countries situated in the Northern Hemisphere, but in many respects a North-South encounter.

Although geographically located in the north, China is widely seen as a leading voice of what might be called the "New South."

Its historical trajectory, developmental experience, and civilizational memory place it closer to many of the aspirations, anxieties, and ambitions of developing nations than to the traditional Western powers that shaped the post-World War II order.

China remembers poverty, fragmentation, foreign occupation and underdevelopment not as distant historical abstractions but as important components of its modern national identity. That memory continues to influence how Beijing approaches the world today.

For many nations across Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia, and parts of the Middle East, China's rise demonstrates that economic modernization outside the traditional Western political model is possible.

The expansion of BRICS, the growing attraction of alternative financial institutions such as the New Development Bank, and the demand for Chinese infrastructure investment across the developing world all reflect a broader search for greater strategic autonomy in international affairs.

Beijing's international discourse resonates across much of the developing world because it is anchored primarily in the language of development, connectivity, sovereignty, and long-term economic transformation rather than ideological conversion.

In many capitals of the Global South, the central geopolitical question is no longer which power offers the most attractive political doctrine, but which partnerships are best positioned to deliver infrastructure, industrial growth, technology transfer, educational opportunities, and economic stability.

Development itself has increasingly become the new language of sovereignty.

That is why the significance of the Trump-Xi meeting extends far beyond bilateral negotiations.

The world today confronts enormous collective challenges: the future of free trade, the preservation of global peace, the governance of artificial intelligence, climate adaptation, energy security, supply-chain resilience, and the ethical dilemmas generated by the rapid expansion of scientific and technological frontiers.

None of these questions can be resolved through unilateralism or through geopolitical domination that characterized international politics earlier.

The great strategic question of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is no longer who possesses the strongest army, but whose vision of the future is more attractive, more inclusive, and more capable of producing prosperity. China understands this transformation very well.

Beijing has consistently promoted concepts such as the "community with a shared future for humanity", an idea frequently dismissed in parts of the West as rhetorical abstraction.

Yet behind the slogan lies an attempt to articulate an alternative philosophical foundation for global governance – one less centered on ideological universalism and more focused on coexistence, economic integration, connectivity, and civilizational pluralism.

Naturally, critics question whether Chinese practice always aligns with Chinese discourse. Across large parts of the developing world, there is growing fatigue with an international order that is excessively concentrated in a limited number of Western capitals.

Many emerging nations increasingly seek participation rather than subordination; partnership rather than tutelage.

The appeal of multipolarity stems not necessarily from anti-Western sentiment, but from the perception that the existing system has failed to adequately accommodate the aspirations of the broader developing world.

This does not signal the decline or irrelevance of the US. American innovation, financial influence, military reach, scientific leadership, and cultural power remain extraordinary assets.

Nor should the Trump-Xi encounter be romanticized as a coherent ideological dialogue between North and South.

The US president hardly represents the traditional liberal internationalist establishment that dominated Western diplomacy after the Cold War.

Political rise of the US president, in many respects, reflects growing dissatisfaction within the West itself regarding the costs and contradictions of globalization.

The growing inequality within Western societies is driven more by the societies' uneven wealth distribution than by the effects of globalization.

That is precisely what makes this meeting historically revealing. Both countries, in different ways, embody competing responses to a world in transition.

For the Global South, the symbolism of the meeting matters as much as any agreement eventually signed behind closed doors.

It reflects the growing recognition that emerging nations can no longer be treated as peripheral actors in the global conversation.

The world is entering a new phase in which legitimacy will depend less on the capacity to instill fear and more on the ability to inspire confidence, deliver development, and accommodate others' aspirations.

That may ultimately prove to be the deeper significance of the encounter between presidents Trump and Xi – and perhaps one of the defining lessons of the emerging international order of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*\*The author is a visiting professor at the China Foreign Affairs University, and a senior fellow at the Policy Center for the New South.*

– Courtesy of China Daily



President Xi Jinping (centre, right) gestures during a welcome ceremony for US President Donald Trump (centre, left) at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday.

– AFP

## Myanmar proposes death sentence for cyberscam offences

YANGON – Myanmar published a parliamentary bill yesterday proposing the death sentence for those who detain or violently coerce victims into working in online scam centres.

Internet fraud factories have flourished in war-torn Myanmar, part of Southeast Asia's thriving scam economy, targeting web users worldwide with romance and cryptocurrency investment cons.

The multibillion-dollar black market attracts many willing employees, but repatriated foreigners have also reported being trafficked to sites in Myanmar and tortured by scam centre operators.

The draft legislation would allow capital punishment for "violence, torture, unlawful arrest and detention, or cruel treatment against another person for the purpose of forcing them to commit online scams".

The "Anti-Online Scam Bill" also includes a maximum sentence of life in prison for those who "run an online scam centre" and those who "commit digital currency scams (crypto scams)".

Myanmar's military-backed parliament – which many analysts describe as a rubber-stamp legislature – is next scheduled to sit in the first week of June.

### Scam hotspot

The civil war triggered by a 2021 military coup has seeded instability across Myanmar, which monitors say has created fertile ground for organised crime groups to set up shop in fortified compounds.

Victims in the United States alone were scammed out of more

than US\$20 billion through such schemes last year, according to the US Federal Bureau of Investigation.

It has also ramped up tensions with neighbouring China, which has become irked at the number of its citizens founding scam centres, working in them and falling victim to them, according to analysts.

Over the course of Myanmar's five-year civil war, China has intermittently thrown its weight behind both rebels and the military to suit its security and economic interests, monitors say.

It has favoured the military recently, backing a junta-run election that shut out opposition parties including the National League for Democracy of Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been detained since the coup.

The "Anti-Online Scam Bill" is the first legislation presented by the new government that is headed by Min Aung Hlaing, who assumed the role of civilian president last month.

Democracy watchdogs dismiss the government transition as a bid to rebrand military rule and put an end to the pariah status Myanmar's leadership has endured since the coup.

The new government has touted concessions, including announcing Suu Kyi's move from prison to house arrest two weeks ago, although critics dismiss such measures as an attempt to launder its image.

The anti-scam bill promises a new committee to cooperate with other countries to combat the illicit industry, another apparent invitation for foreign engagement with the new government. – AFP

## Thai PM says clip vowing reopened Cambodia border 'obviously AI'

BANGKOK – Thailand's Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul has rejected an audio clip of him purportedly promising to reopen border crossings with Cambodia as false and "obviously" AI-generated.

Ahead of a February election that kept Anutin in office, the conservative leader promised to keep closed border crossings with Cambodia, which were first shut in June amid border tensions that later erupted into deadly clashes.

Social media posts this week included still images of Anutin with audio purportedly of him speaking in Thai about plans to reopen the border.

A 28-second TikTok video shared on May 10 says: "As for the border crossings, we have to wait for things to quiet down because the public is watching. I'll open them, but not every single checkpoint."

"The border crossings are expected to open by early June at the latest, otherwise our economy might suffer," it adds.

But Anutin said the clip was fake, and AFP fact-checkers ran the audio through a media analysis tool which said it was "very likely AI-generated".

"It's obviously AI," the prime minister told reporters on Wednesday, adding jokingly: "I don't speak that eloquently."

"Please do not believe it. The clip is not reliable. I never said that. There is no open border crossing," Anutin said.

The TikTok post garnered more than 50,000 views and 1,700 likes.

Some comments suggested users believed the audio was genuine.

"The Thai economy doesn't depend on Cambodia, you idiot," one wrote.

Thailand and Cambodia have disputed the demarcation of their 800-kilometre border for decades, a legacy of the French colonial era.

The long-standing conflict erupted into fighting in July and December that killed dozens of people and displaced more than a million.

The neighbours signed a ceasefire agreement in late December, but tensions remain, with both sides trading accusations of truce violations.

AFP has previously debunked another AI-generated audio clip purporting to show Anutin speaking Chinese fluently. – AFP

## Ex-Philippine drug war enforcer flees Senate refuge

MANILA – The chief enforcer of former Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte's deadly drug war has fled the Senate, where he had sought refuge to escape arrest over alleged crimes against humanity, the chamber's president said yesterday.

A day earlier gunshots rang out in the Senate in Manila during a confrontation that erupted after Senator Ronald Dela Rosa had sheltered in the building to avoid an International Criminal Court warrant.

Dela Rosa was the national police chief from 2016-2018 during the first two years of Duterte's anti-narcotics crackdown that killed thousands and now faces ICC allegations.

"The sergeant at arms has confirmed that Senator Bato is no longer in the building," Senate President Alan Peter Cayetano told a news conference, using Dela Rosa's nickname.

Cayetano said he gave Dela Rosa a ride to the Senate on Monday, where the former police chief narrowly evaded arrest by government agents who chased him up the stairs.

Dela Rosa vowed to fight efforts to arrest him and turn him over to the Netherlands-based ICC, as Cayetano forbade government agents from serving him an ICC arrest warrant.

Duterte was arrested in March last year over an ICC case stemming from drug war killings and flown to the Netherlands, where he is being held in The Hague awaiting trial.

Cayetano said Dela Rosa's wife sent him a message confirming that her husband had "made his escape".

He did not say where Dela Rosa had gone or when he left and angrily denied accusations that the Senate leadership had helped Dela Rosa leave.

"He made this decision on his own," Cayetano stressed.

The ICC confirmed it had issued an arrest warrant for Dela Rosa,



Philippine Senate President Alan Peter Cayetano shows members of the media the confirmation letter that the Senate received the articles of impeachment for Vice President Sara Duterte at his office in the Senate in Manila yesterday, a day after gun shots were fired inside the building.

Police said yesterday they detained a person in connection with gunfire the previous night inside the Philippine senate, where a lawmaker wanted by the International Criminal Court took refuge. – AFP

accusing him of the crime against humanity of murder.

On Wednesday, Senate security personnel and a National Bureau of Investigation employee both fired into the air during a tense confrontation at the Senate complex on Wednesday night, forcing legislators to take cover inside their offices.

### New impeachment trial

Cayetano said Dela Rosa's disappearance was discovered shortly after police announced yesterday the arrest of a person in connection the gunfire.

Police seized live ammunition from the man they arrested, who was being tested for gunshot residue.

Even as the Dela Rosa controversy was unresolved, Cayetano announced yesterday that the senate would open next week the trial of Duterte's impeached eldest daughter, Vice President Sara Duterte.

She was impeached or formally accused Monday of graft charges and an alleged assassination plot

against former ally President Ferdinand Marcos.

Under the Philippine constitution, an impeachment triggers a trial in the Senate, where a guilty verdict would see her removed and banned from elected office for life.

Duterte, who has announced a 2028 presidential bid, expressed dismay at the senate incidents while criticising what she said were the priorities of her former ally President Ferdinand Marcos.

"What we are seeing now is an administration using all government resources to demolish political opposition or those individuals who do not follow or agree (with) or support (Marcos)," she said in a recorded video statement.

Duterte and Marcos have been engaged in a high-stakes political brawl that erupted within weeks of their 2022 presidential election victory, when the vice president was denied her desired defence portfolio and instead named education secretary. – AFP

## Philippine NBI lacks arrest warrant, senate security officer opens fire first: interior secretary

MANILA – The Philippine National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) had no arrest warrant for Senator Ronald Dela Rosa when they were deployed near the Senate building on Wednesday night, according to a message sent from the interior secretary to the Senate president.

Alan Peter Cayetano yesterday said Jonvic Remulla, secretary of the Department of the Interior and Local Government, texted him that 21 NBI agents arrived at the Senate at 6:15 p.m. [local time] on Wednesday to provide security and were stationed on different floors of the building.

One NBI agent, identified only as Francisco, was seated on the second floor of the Senate complex when he was questioned by Mao Aplasca, head of the Office of the Sergeant-at-Arms (OSAA). Francisco stood up with a rifle slung sideways across his body.

According to Remulla, Aplasca immediately fired a warning shot, and Francisco also pulled the trigger with his gun pointed upward. The OSAA personnel fired 27 rounds in total, while Francisco discharged five rounds before fleeing the scene.

NBI chief Melvin Matibag denied on Wednesday that NBI agents were involved in the shooting incident. Yesterday, Cayetano denied the allegations that the incident was a "diversion" to let Dela Rosa leave the Senate, saying: "None of the senators who were here last night knew that that's gonna happen, and the shots were fired from both sides."

Cayetano said he had agreed with Remulla to launch an investigation into the incident.

Amid tensions surrounding reports of an attempted arrest of Dela Rosa, gunshots rang out from

the Philippine Senate complex on Wednesday night, triggering chaos and confusion inside the building. The situation later calmed down, according to Senate officials.

Remulla came to the Senate building on Wednesday night and said Dela Rosa was safe. Cayetano yesterday confirmed that Dela Rosa is no longer inside the Senate building.

The International Criminal Court unsealed an arrest warrant for Dela Rosa on Monday evening, which was originally issued as secret in November 2025. Dela Rosa's camp filed an urgent manifestation and omnibus motion through a law firm on Monday. He requested the issuance of a temporary restraining order and writ of preliminary injunction, prohibiting any arrest, detention, turnover, transfer, rendition, or surrender of him without a valid Philippine judicial warrant. – Xinhua

## UN voices 'serious concern' over detention of Afghan journalists

KABUL – The United Nations expressed “serious concern” yesterday over the detention of at least three Afghan journalists, arrested last week by Taliban security agencies on unknown charges.

The UN’s Afghanistan mission UNAMA also criticised “assaults against journalists and confiscation of property during search operations” by the authorities.

“UNAMA calls for clarification of the legal basis and any charges against the detained journalists,” it said in a statement.

TOLONews said in a post on X on Sunday that two of its journalists, Imran Danish and Mansoor Niazi, had been detained in the Afghan capital.

“Security officials, in talks with TOLONews, have said that details on this matter will be shared after

the relevant legal procedures,” it said.

At least one other journalist was also arrested, according to UNAMA, but the Taliban government did not respond to an AFP request for comment yesterday.

The information and culture ministry said on Tuesday that “a few days ago, two TOLONews journalists were arrested by security agencies”.

“Their case is under investigation. The court has not ruled yet,” ministry spokesman Khubaib Ghofran said in a statement, without specifying the reasons for their arrest.

Advocacy group the Committee to Protect Journalists, in a post on X on Tuesday, called on Afghanistan’s Taliban authorities to “immediately and unconditionally

release the detained journalists and ensure the press can operate without interference”.

The Afghanistan Media Support Organisation, a local watchdog, expressed “deep concerns” over the arrests in a statement issued on Sunday.

It deplored the lack of “precise information... regarding the reasons for their arrests or their whereabouts”.

According to the Afghan watchdog, six other journalists are currently detained by the Taliban authorities.

“A free, independent, and safe press is essential for transparency, accountability, and the well-being of Afghan society,” UNAMA said.

Afghanistan ranks 175 out of 180 on the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index. – AFP



Members of the Students' Federation of India protest against the National Testing Agency (NTA) after the cancellation of the NEET (National Eligibility cum Entrance Test) examination over an alleged paper leak, in Chennai, India yesterday. – AFP

## Storms, lightning kill 89 in India's Uttar Pradesh state

NEW DELHI – Powerful storms including gales, lightning, rain and hail killed at least 89 people in India’s most populous state of Uttar Pradesh, a government aid agency official said yesterday.

Uttar Pradesh, home to more than 240 million people, is frequently hit by storms during the summer months ahead of the monsoon rains, with lightning strikes a regular cause of death.

“Due to adverse weather conditions on May 13, reports have been received of 89 human casualties, 53 injuries, 114 livestock losses, and 87 house damages in the

state,” the Relief Commissioner’s office said in a statement.

India’s weather office has in recent years warned of an increase in extreme weather events, including intense thunderstorms and lightning, which experts link to rising temperatures and changing climate patterns.

The statement said officials have been instructed to distribute financial aid to the affected families.

The violent weather that tore across Uttar Pradesh on Wednesday was part of widespread pre-monsoon thunderstorm activity triggered by unstable atmospheric conditions. – AFP

## 5 soldiers, 7 militants killed in Pakistan clashes

QUETTA – At least five soldiers and seven militants were killed in clashes in Pakistan’s turbulent southwestern province of Balochistan, officials said yesterday.

An improvised explosive device detonated near a convoy of paramilitary Frontier Corps troops and was followed by a clash with militants, they said.

“Five soldiers were killed and another was critically wounded,” a senior official told AFP.

“During the operation, a group of terrorists was located and engaged by troops. During fire exchange seven terrorists were killed,” the army’s media wing said in a statement.

The Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), the province’s most active militant separatist group, claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement sent to AFP.

The group, which the United States has designated a terrorist organisation, said it had targeted military installations as well as police and civil administration officials in gun attacks and suicide bombings.

The BLA has intensified attacks on Pakistanis from other provinces working in the region in recent years, as well as foreign energy firms.

Last year the separatists attacked a train with 450 passengers on board, sparking a deadly two-day siege. – AFP



People drink sugarcane juice to cool off amid a heat wave in Karachi, Pakistan, yesterday. Meanwhile, in Lahore there are heavy downpours. – Xinhua

## UN says can feed a million more Afghan children if wars stop

KABUL – The United Nations could feed a million additional children at risk of malnutrition in Afghanistan if the country’s conflict with Pakistan and the Iran war had not inflated prices and transport costs, a senior official told AFP.

Afghanistan saw a record rise in malnutrition cases in 2025, following a deadly earthquake, climate disasters, and the return of millions of Afghans expelled from Iran and Pakistan.

“It is a nutrition crisis here in Afghanistan,” Carl Skau, Deputy Executive Director of the UN’s World Food Programme (WFP), told AFP.

“The surge last year was the worst we’ve ever seen. It’s worse this year.”

The WFP estimated in January that five million women and children in Afghanistan, out of a population of more than 40 million,

will experience a life-threatening level of malnutrition this year.

Afghanistan’s ongoing conflict with its neighbour Pakistan has led to a near-total border closure for around eight months.

Along with the global economic fallout from the Iran war, that has driven up prices for food and fuel and disrupted the supply chains needed to deliver them.

“If we weren’t struggling with the supply chain, both delays and costs, we would be able to feed a million more children here in Afghanistan,” Skau said.

He cited the example of thousands of tonnes of fortified biscuits meant for Afghan schoolchildren, which the WFP had planned to send into the country via Pakistan.

With the border closed, the WFP rerouted the supplies via Dubai and Iran – only for the Middle East conflict to erupt,

forcing yet another detour through seven countries, including Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Georgia and Turkmenistan.

“It’s about to arrive this week, but it’s taken... months. It cost us way more,” Skau said.

Fundraising has proven difficult, and the WFP has raised only eight percent of this year’s target amount for Afghanistan.

Skau recounted seeing long queues of women with young children suffering from severe malnutrition who walked hours to reach a rural clinic in eastern Afghanistan, only to be turned away.

“We did not have assistance to give them... The desperation in the voice of these women will stay with me for a long time,” he said.

“If there is one thing that the world agrees on, it’s that children should not die from hunger.” – AFP

## Delhi announces work-from-home days to weather fuel shortage

NEW DELHI – India’s capital announced fuel-saving measures yesterday, including work-from-home days for government employees, after Prime Minister Narendra Modi called for reduced consumption as the Middle East war disrupts supply chains.

India is one of the few countries in the region that has not increased prices of petrol and diesel for domestic consumers or rationed supplies.

However, it has increased prices of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) – a primary cooking fuel in India – after disruptions following the US-Israeli strikes on Iran that led to Iran’s near-total blockade of the strategic Strait of Hormuz.

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha

Gupta said the 90-day drive will entail reduced official fuel use and travel, and a push for residents to cut back on private vehicle use and shift to public transport in the sprawling megacity.

Government offices will have two work-from-home days a week for those able to work remotely, Gupta said, adding that the private sector was expected to follow suit voluntarily.

“Our appeal to the people of Delhi is that once a week, each of us should have a no-vehicle day,” Gupta told reporters.

Other austerity measures will include the cancellation of large official public events over the next three months and foreign travel for

a year, she said.

The Delhi government will also halt purchases of new petrol, diesel, compressed natural gas (CNG) or hybrid vehicles for six months, the chief minister said.

Modi said on Sunday that restrictions on fuel use were also necessary to save foreign currency spent on fuel imports.

“We must also place a strong emphasis on saving foreign exchange, as petrol and diesel have become so expensive globally,” he said.

New Delhi has also boosted its import tariffs on gold and silver in an effort to shore up the sagging value of the rupee and bolster foreign currency reserves hit by the war. – AFP

## France blames stomach bug for new cruise outbreak, lifts lockdown

Carole Suhas and Thomas Saint-Cricq

BORDEAUX – French authorities on Wednesday allowed asymptomatic passengers to leave a British cruise ship, saying a gastrointestinal virus was behind an outbreak of sickness that came after an elderly man died of a heart attack.

Earlier, authorities had ordered a lockdown for the more than 1,700 passengers and crew on the vessel, but insisted there was no connection with the hantavirus outbreak suspected of killing three people on the Dutch-flagged MV Hondius cruise ship, which has sparked international alarm.

Testing confirmed the outbreak on the *Ambition*, a cruise ship anchored in the port of Bordeaux in western France, was “a gastrointestinal infection of viral origin”, the local government and regional health agency said in a statement.

They said there were no severe cases, and that asymptomatic individuals were now free to disembark, but that those infected were required to remain in isolation on board.

News that a 92-year-old British passenger had died on the ship as dozens of others suffered upset stomachs initially caused concern.

But health authorities said the man had suffered a heart attack and that his death appeared unrelated to the illnesses.

“At this stage, no link has been established with the gastroenteritis episode,” they said.

Port authorities said his body remained on board, “in accordance with international conventions”.

### Bingo on board

Authorities said that since Monday, 80 people on the ship had suffered from “symptoms consistent with an acute digestive infection”.

They said the lockdown order had been issued as an “abundance of caution” and to “avoid psychosis”, given international worry over the

hantavirus outbreak on the *Hondius*, which set sail from Argentina and is now heading back to the Netherlands after being evacuated.

The *Ambition*, which is operated by the UK-based Ambassador Cruise Line company, arrived in Bordeaux on Tuesday with 1,233 passengers, mostly from Britain and Ireland, and 514 crew.

One passenger enduring the lockdown on Wednesday, Seos Guilidhe, a 52-year-old from the Northern Irish capital Belfast, sent AFP a message via Facebook as he was “playing bingo”.

“We are onboard with extra sanitation guidelines in place. It is not as bad as it was during Covid. People just going about as normal,” he wrote, referring to lockdowns during the coronavirus pandemic.

Passengers could be seen taking pictures of the French city from the deck.

Guilidhe later messaged: “We are allowed off the ship, restrictions lifted.”

Others were less fortunate.

“Two of us in one cabin with the bug is a challenge,” an infected passenger posted on Facebook.

### Waiting for ‘clearance’

Passengers on board the *Ambition* showed peak symptoms on Monday, when the ship was docked in Brest, officials said.

The deceased man died before the cruise liner arrived at the port in France’s northwestern Brittany region.

The ship, which left the Shetland Islands in the north of Scotland on May 6, stopped in Belfast and Liverpool in England before reaching Bordeaux, from where it was scheduled to depart for Spain.

It was initially supposed to dock back in Liverpool on May 22.

The cruise line company said on its Facebook page its figures showed an increase in cases of illness after guests embarked in Liverpool on Saturday. – AFP

## UK health minister quits ahead of possible challenge to Starmer

Peter Hutchison and Helen Rowe

LONDON – Britain’s health minister Wes Streeting announced yesterday that he had resigned, plunging Keir Starmer’s premiership deeper into crisis as potential challengers positioned themselves for a possible leadership challenge.

Streeting, popular on the right of the ruling centre-left Labour party, stopped short of formally announcing a bid for the top job but called for the “best possible field of candidates” to run to replace Starmer.

It came after ex-deputy prime minister Angela Rayner, a left-wing figurehead amongst Labour’s grassroots, announced that she had cleared obstacles preventing her from running in any future race.

Starmer led his Labour party to victory in 2024 elections that ended 14 years of Conservative rule but is fighting for his political life after disastrous local and regional polls last week.

After days of calls by Labour lawmakers for the premier to quit or set a date for his departure, Streeting became the first senior minister to break ranks, saying he had “lost confidence” in Starmer’s leadership.

“It is now clear that you will not lead the Labour Party into the next general election”, scheduled for 2029, Streeting told Starmer in a resignation letter that he published on X.

Streeting accused Starmer of lacking vision and said a debate about what comes next for the ruling party “needs to be broad, and it needs to be the best possible field of candidates”.

Last Thursday’s election results, which saw huge gains for the right-wing Reform UK party and the left-wing Greens, compounded months of anger towards Starmer over his decision to appoint – and sack – ex-Jeffrey Epstein associate Peter Mandelson as his US envoy.

The polls also saw Labour lose control of the devolved Welsh



Britain’s Health Secretary Wes Streeting arrives at Downing Street to meet with the prime minister in central London on Wednesday. Streeting, possible rival to Britain’s embattled Prime Minister Keir Starmer, announced his resignation yesterday. – AFP

parliament for the first time and fail to make up ground on the pro-independence Scottish National Party (SNP) in the parliament in Edinburgh.

### ‘Change’

Four junior ministers have resigned, and more than 80 Labour MPs have urged Starmer to quit, but he has vowed to cling on and at least 100 lawmakers from the ruling party have called for him to stay.

The numbers highlight bitter divisions amongst the party’s 403 MPs that would likely deepen during any contest, which could last several months and distract the party from governing.

Starmer has vowed to fight any contest, pledging this week to do better and prove his doubters “wrong”. His spokesman insisted yesterday that he was “getting on with the job”.

Starmer has been backed by several senior cabinet ministers, including Finance Minister Rachel Reeves who urged colleagues yesterday not to put the economy “at risk” by “plunging the country into chaos” with a leadership challenge.

It is unclear whether Streeting has the required support of 81

Labour MPs – 20 percent of the party in parliament – to trigger a contest.

A source close to him insisted to AFP that he does but would prefer that Starmer set out a detailed timetable to step down instead.

A timetable could allow Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham, popular on the party’s so-called soft left, to also run.

He is currently unable to do so as he does not have a seat in the Westminster parliament.

Rayner announced that UK tax authorities had “cleared” her of deliberate wrongdoing in a tax affair, opening the way for her to compete in any potential contest.

She had been forced to quit in September for underpaying a property duty.

The 46-year-old insisted she would not be the one to trigger a race but told the *Guardian* newspaper she would play “whatever role I can” to “deliver the change”.

Rayner has stopped short of calling for Starmer to resign but called on him to “reflect” on his position, having said voters are frustrated with the way the government is being run. – AFP

## US forecasters says chances of strong El Niño growing

WASHINGTON, DC – The US climate prediction centre said yesterday that the potentially powerful El Niño weather pattern is “likely to emerge soon” and could reach “very strong” levels later in the year.

It’s the latest forecast to raise concern over how the naturally occurring phenomenon could pile on to climate change impacts and leave populations worldwide vulnerable to extreme weather.

Scientists at the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) said in their latest monthly bulletin that there’s an 82 percent chance El Niño will emerge between May and July and continue into next year.

And there’s currently a more than 50 percent chance that it will become “strong” or “very strong” at some point from September through November, according to NOAA charts.

But scientists cautioned that

“while confidence in the occurrence of El Niño has increased since last month, there is still substantial uncertainty in the peak strength of El Niño.”

They also emphasised that “stronger events do not always mean bigger weather and climate impacts,” though “stronger events can make it more likely that certain impacts could occur.”

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

It is one phase of a natural climate cycle in Pacific Ocean temperatures and trade winds. It influences global weather and increases the likelihood of drought, heavy rainfall and other climate extremes.

It also adds heat to a planet already warmed from burning fossil fuels. The last El Niño helped make 2023 and 2024 the second- and first-hottest years on record, respectively. – AFP

## UK artist seeks selfies for AI-generated ‘national portrait’

LONDON – A British artist yesterday urged the public to contribute selfies so she can create a new “national portrait” with the help of AI for London’s National Portrait Gallery.

“There are 55 million adults in the United Kingdom. What if we could all be present in one picture – whatever our backgrounds or beliefs, however much we disagree with each other on so many things?” Es Devlin said of the concept.

The digital art project “reimagines what national identity could be”, the artist, who has been drawing portraits with chalks and charcoal for 30 years, told AFP in an interview.

Devlin had the idea to create a “national portrait” about three

years ago and developed the digital method in collaboration with Google Arts and Culture Lab.

The huge-scale project would not be possible without the use of AI to generate thousands of drawings that resemble her own style.

She appealed for UK residents aged 18 and over to take a selfie on a smartphone and upload it onto the website of the “collective artwork”.

The artist will then use AI tools to turn each photo into an image resembling a charcoal sketch, a process that takes just seconds.

At a launch presentation at the National Portrait Gallery, the first portraits created earlier that day were shown on a screen on the wall.

Each face was quickly sketched on screen, immediately followed

by another, as if each person were blending into the next.

The images went on display alongside the gallery’s collection of portraits of notable figures, which include King Charles III, Catherine, the Princess of Wales, conservationist Jane Goodall and fashion doyenne Anna Wintour.

“We are all in this country together: let’s all be in this portrait, united,” Devlin urged British people at a press conference.

“We’re hoping that thousands of people all over the country will be participating as we speak,” said Victoria Siddall, director of the National Portrait Gallery.

The installation, on display until October, will create “a true portrait of the nation”, the director said. – AFP

# Blackouts, protests as Cuba says fuel has ‘run out’

HAVANA – Cuba was hit by worsening power outages yesterday as the island’s communist government said oil reserves had run out and rare protests broke out around the capital Havana.

Eastern Cuba was plunged yesterday into the latest of regular electricity shutdowns affecting the whole country, while people protested against power outages in neighbourhoods around Havana, in the west of the island.

Oil reserves sent by Russia have now “run out,” Energy Minister Vicente de la O Levy told state television, describing the situation as “very tense.”

“The heat continues to rise, and the impact of the blockade is indeed causing us significant harm... because we are still not receiving fuel.”

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio renewed an offer of US\$100 million in aid on the condition that the assistance be distributed by the Catholic Church, bypassing the government.

“We are ready to hear the details of the proposal and how it would be implemented,” said Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez on social media.

A resident of San Miguel del Padrón, a neighbourhood on the outskirts of Havana, told AFP that people had protested the power cuts by banging pots and pans on Wednesday evening.

Several other similar small protests were held in neighbourhoods across the capital to express widespread frustration, according to accounts gathered by AFP.



Residents walk along a street during a blackout in Havana on Wednesday. – AFP

“Turn on the lights!” shouted residents in Playa, a district in the western part of the capital.

President Miguel Díaz-Canel on Wednesday blamed a US-imposed “genocidal energy blockade” on Cuba for its grim energy shortages.

Data compiled by AFP showed prolonged blackouts and record generation shortfalls in recent days – 65 percent of Cuban territory endured simultaneous blackouts on Tuesday.

“This dramatic worsening has a single cause: the genocidal energy blockade to which the United States subjects our country, threatening irrational tariffs against any nation that supplies us with fuel,” Díaz-Canel said.

The island’s energy crisis worsened in January when the United States imposed an oil blockade on the island of 9.6 million inhabitants.

Since then, only one Russian tanker has reached Cuba, which is in the throes of economic stagnation and supply shortages.

Outages of more than 19 hours a day have hit Havana, while in several provinces, blackouts last for entire days.

Cuba’s electricity generation is sustained by a network of eight ageing thermoelectric plants – some in operation for over 40 years – that suffer frequent breakdowns or must be shut down for maintenance cycles.

Cubans have endured seven nationwide blackouts since 2024, and fuel prices have soared.

President Donald Trump – who since the start of the year has deposed Venezuela’s leftist leader but seen less success in a war on Iran – has mused that Cuba could be next and that the United States could take over the island. – AFP

# Portugal to provisionally nationalize abandoned land to prevent wildfires

LISBON – Portugal will activate a mechanism to provisionally register abandoned rural land as state-owned when no identifiable owner can be found, as part of the efforts to ensure proper maintenance and wildfire prevention, the *Jornal de Negócios* business daily reported on Monday.

The measure targets plots registered in the tax authority’s property database but lacking an owner.

Once registered, the management of the land will be handed to Florestgal, a state-owned forestry management company operating across 27 municipalities, which may also lease or transfer use of the land to

third parties during the interim period.

Legitimate owners will have 15 years to come forward and reclaim their property before the state registration becomes permanent.

The procedure was created in 2019 following a series of devastating wildfires in Portugal, but was never implemented.

The move now addresses a longstanding challenge to land management in Portugal: a large part of small rural properties has changed hands over generations through inheritance, donations or unregistered sales, leaving many plots effectively abandoned with no traceable owner.

According to specialists interviewed by Xinhua, the absence of accountable landowners has long been identified as a key factor in the spread of wildfires, as unclaimed land often goes unmanaged.

Forest owners and industries are advocating for an increase of fast-growing commercial forests in abandoned scrubland to reduce the risk of fire and promote development.

Due to a lack of clearing, unproductive areas are often where the fires start, Luis Damas, president of the board of the National Federation of Forest Owners Associations, told Xinhua. – Xinhua

# Brazil’s presidential hopeful Flávio Bolsonaro denies wrongdoing in ties to jailed banker

Juan Sebastian Serrano

BRASÍLIA – Brazilian presidential hopeful Flávio Bolsonaro denied wrongdoing on Wednesday after the release of an audio recording in which he asks for money from a banker jailed over a multi-million US dollar fraud scandal.

Daniel Vorcaro was the major shareholder in the small private Master Bank that collapsed last year, sparking a major fraud investigation that has rattled the highest echelons of power in Latin America’s largest economy.

The probe has included examination of connections with politicians and judges and has dominated newspaper headlines as Brazil gears up for elections in October.

The audio recording was published by investigative outlet The Intercept Brasil as polls put 45-year-old Bolsonaro neck-and-neck with 80-year-old President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who is expected to seek a fourth term.

Bolsonaro is the eldest son of far-right former president Jair Bolsonaro, who is in jail for an attempted coup.

“It makes me uncomfortable to be asking you,” the politician tells banker Vorcaro in the recording, referring to him as “brother”.

The recording, which The Intercept said is from September 8, 2025, relates to a film about Jair Bolsonaro’s life that was in production at the time.

“We’re at a very decisive moment here with the film. And since there are many overdue payments, everyone is tense,” Flávio Bolsonaro says.

## ‘Zero public funds’

According to The Intercept, the audio is part of a series of records documenting a deal in which Vorcaro pledged to contribute US\$24 million to the film “Dark Horse”, in which “The Passion of the Christ” star Jim Caviezel plays Jair Bolsonaro.

Just under half of that amount was actually paid, the publication said.

Flávio Bolsonaro said that “zero public funds” were involved in the transaction.

“What happened was that a son sought PRIVATE sponsorship for a PRIVATE film about the life story of his own father,” he said in a statement in which he did not dispute the authenticity of the recording.

Flávio Bolsonaro said his connection to Vorcaro dates back to 2024, “when there were no public accusations or suspicions regarding the banker.”

The banking fraud scandal erupted in November when Master Bank was found to be insolvent and liquidated, leaving more than US\$7 billion in debt due to some 800,000 investors who were paid out by a deposit guarantee fund.

Vorcaro was first arrested while attempting to leave Brazil aboard a private jet as police investigated financial fraud linked to the collapse.

Leaked messages from the banker’s mobile phone, along with other documents related to the case, have revealed that he maintained close ties with several lawmakers and justices from Brazil’s Supreme Court.

Lula, who acknowledged meeting with the banker in 2024, has pledged that the investigation would be pursued “to its fullest extent.” – AFP



Brazilian Senator Flávio Bolsonaro, son of former President Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022), delivers a speech during the launch of his pre-candidacy for the presidency in Florianópolis, Santa Catarina state, southern Brazil, last Saturday. – AFP

# Spain gears up for August 12 total solar eclipse

MADRID – Spain, one of the few places in the world where a total solar eclipse will be visible in August, has begun preparations for an event it hopes will shift tourism away from the beaches and towards the countryside.

Aside from Spain, the next total solar eclipse will also be visible in Greenland, Iceland, Russia and a small portion of Portugal, with a partial eclipse in other parts of Europe and western Africa.

The Spanish government said in a statement yesterday that the Iberian Peninsula “will be the only populated place in the world where the total solar eclipse of August 12 can be fully enjoyed, the first of its kind visible in our country in more than 100 years”.

At its peak, when the Moon completely covers the Sun, darkening the sky in the middle of the day, the eclipse will last just over two minutes in Spain.

The government said yesterday it has selected the Yebes Observatory in the central province of Guadalajara – a key node in global radio astronomy networks – as the official monitoring centre for the eclipse.

It will be the first of three major eclipses Spain will experience between 2026 and 2028.

On August 2, 2027, a second total solar eclipse with an unusually long duration of six minutes will cross

southern Spain, while an annular eclipse – in which the Moon does not fully cover the Sun, leaving a bright ring – is expected in January 2028.

Accommodation prices have already surged in areas where the total solar eclipse will be visible but which are not typically popular summer tourism destinations.

A search for lodging yesterday in the northeastern city of Teruel for the night of August 12 showed

prices ranging from about 300 euros (US\$351) for a modest hostel to 1,400 euros for a privately rented apartment.

In Burgos, no accommodation was available for less than 600 euros, while a 60-square-metre apartment was listed at 5,000 euros.

Teruel’s tourism office has promoted the city as an ideal location to observe the eclipse, citing its open landscapes, clear skies and low levels of light pollution. – AFP

# Iran says no US visas issued yet for 2026 World Cup



TEHRAN - Iran's football federation chief said yesterday that no visas had yet been issued for the national team to participate in the 2026 World Cup in the United States, state media reported.

"Tomorrow (today) or the day after tomorrow (tomorrow), we will have a decisive meeting with FIFA. They must give us guarantees, because the visa issue has still not been resolved," the state news agency IRNA quoted federation chief Mehdi Taj as saying.

"We have not received any account from the other side regarding who has been granted visas. No visas have been issued yet," he added.

According to Taj, the players were expected to travel to the Turkish capital Ankara for fingerprinting as part of the visa process.

"The players must travel to Ankara for fingerprinting, but we are trying to arrange for this to be done in Antalya so there will be no need to travel to Ankara," he said.

Iran has been at war with the United States and Israel since February 28, though a fragile ceasefire has been in place since April 8.

Iran's deputy foreign minister, meanwhile,

said that a "host country cannot use political disputes, sanctions or its own unilateral domestic policy decisions" to prevent a team from attending the World Cup.

"If the organising body cannot guarantee that all qualified teams, including Iran, can enter the host country without discrimination or restriction... the credibility of the World Cup itself will be undermined," Kazem Gharibabadi wrote on X.

Tehran and Washington have had no diplomatic relations since 1980 following the hostage crisis at the US embassy, which came after the Islamic revolution that toppled the US-backed shah.

Iran held a send-off ceremony on Wednesday for the national football team as it prepared to play in the 2026 World Cup, co-hosted by the United States, Mexico and Canada.

Iran's national team, also known as TeamMelli, will be based in Tucson, Arizona during the World Cup.

The Iranians open their World Cup campaign against New Zealand in Los Angeles on June 15 before lining up against Belgium and Egypt in Group G. — AFP



Members of Iran's national football team attend a farewell ceremony ahead of their departure for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, in Tehran on Wednesday.

The president of the Iranian Football Federation said late last Saturday that if Iran dropped out of the World Cup, it would deprive the country of a "major diplomatic asset". World football's governing body FIFA has insisted for weeks that Iran will take part. Iran, who are due to be based in Tucson, Arizona, during the World Cup, face New Zealand, Belgium and Egypt in Group G. The Iranians open their World Cup campaign against New Zealand in Los Angeles on June 15. — AFP

## Football shorts

### Japan's Mitoma a major doubt for World Cup

LONDON - Japan winger Kaoru Mitoma is a major doubt for the 2026 World Cup after being ruled out of Brighton's final two Premier League games of the season.

Mitoma suffered a hamstring injury during Brighton's 3-0 win over Wolves last weekend.

Japan coach Hajime Moriyasu is due to name his World Cup squad today.

The absence of Mitoma, who scored the winner in the Samurai Blue's 1-0 victory over England at Wembley in March, would be a major blow to Japan's hopes of progressing beyond the last 16 for the first time.

"Regarding the World Cup, I'm not sure yet. We'll be in touch with the Japan federation," Brighton boss Fabian Hurzeler said yesterday.

"We really have to be patient with this injury, we cannot give a clear schedule.

"He will miss our two games. That is sad for Kaoru. He was in good form and had a big impact on our performances."

Japan will begin their World Cup campaign against the Netherlands in Arlington, Texas on June 14.

They will also face Tunisia and Sweden in Group F. — AFP

### Saudi wealth fund unveiled as official tournament supporter of 2026 World Cup

LAUSANNE - Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF) yesterday signed a partnership with FIFA to become an official tournament supporter in North America and Asia of the

upcoming World Cup.

The PIF partnership incorporates the fund's different companies, "the Savvy Games Group, Saudi Arabia's national and global champion for games and esports, and Qiddiya City, Saudi Arabia's future capital of entertainment, sport and culture".

Throughout the June 11-July 19 tournament, "PIF and its companies will deliver unforgettable experiences and drive innovative fan engagement initiatives to connect with the football community on the world's biggest stage", the fund said in a statement.

As an official tournament supporter, having signed for an undisclosed fee, PIF is among the third category of FIFA partners, at a regional level.

The top level of sponsors includes the likes of Adidas, Coca-Cola and Visa, but also, since 2024, Saudi oil giant Aramco.

The second category brings together businesses from the three host countries of the US, Mexico and Canada.

"PIF continues to expand its global footprint in sport, with football at the heart of this growth," PIF official Mohamed AlSayyad said.

The next World Cup in 2030 will be spread out between Spain, Morocco and Portugal, with three matches in South America. Saudi Arabia will then host the 2034 edition.

PIF last month announced its 2026-2030 strategy would reorganise the fund's investments.

The announcement came as the kingdom and wider Middle East has been upended by the ongoing war in the region.

One of the first casualties was LIV Golf, with PIF saying it was cutting funding for the breakaway golf league. — AFP

## 'Rare, meaningful': N Korean football team ventures into South

Claire Lee



SEOUL - A women's football club will on Sunday be the first sports team from North Korea to visit neighbouring South Korea in eight years.

The isolated and nuclear-armed country's Naegohyang Women's FC will play the South's Suwon FC Women three days later in the Asian Champions League semi-finals.

AFP looks at the trip, the politics and the logistics.

### The politics

The two Koreas remain technically at war because the 1950-53 conflict ended in an armistice, not a peace treaty.

Sports cooperation helped trigger a thaw in inter-Korean ties after North Korea sent athletes, cheerleaders and a high-level delegation to the 2018 Winter Olympics in the South.

The two Koreas also fielded their first unified Olympic team - a joint women's ice hockey squad - at the Pyeongchang Games.

Ri Sol Ju, the wife of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, also visited South Korea in 2005 as part of a North Korean cheering squad for the Asian Athletics Championships.

But relations have sharply deteriorated since US-North Korea nuclear talks collapsed in 2019, with Pyongyang repeatedly declaring itself an "irreversible" nuclear state.

### The logistics

The Naegohyang squad are set to arrive in South Korea by air from Beijing.

A total of 39 people will make the trip, according to South Korea's unification ministry, consisting of 27 players and 12 staff members.

They will stay at a hotel in Suwon, a city about 30 kilometres south of Seoul and where

Wednesday's match will take place.

South Korea's Suwon FC squad will be based at the same hotel.

The dining areas and travel routes will be kept separate, local reports said, making encounters between the two sides unlikely.

The game will be at Suwon Sports Complex, which has a capacity of just under 12,000.

### The law

Under South Korean national security laws it could be deemed illegal to own or brandish the North Korean flag or play its national anthem in public.

A separate law - the Inter-Korean Exchange and Cooperation Act - also requires South Koreans to obtain prior approval from the unification minister before contacting North Koreans by any means.

A government official told AFP the North Korean players' visit had received prior approval, meaning it would not be considered illegal for South Koreans to exchange simple greetings with them.

Under Kim Jong Un "sports are viewed not simply as entertainment, but as a measure of national capability", said Lim Eul-chul, a North Korea expert at the South's Kyungnam University.

Pyongyang is likely "aiming to showcase what it sees as its 'overwhelming superiority' through sporting performance, using it as an opportunity to send a strong message that it is superior to its 'hostile state' rival", he told AFP.

### The club

North Korea are traditionally strong in women's football, especially at youth level, where they have won multiple World Cups in recent years.

Naegohyang FC, based in North Korea's capital Pyongyang, are a rising force in the women's game

in the country, according to South Korea's unification ministry.

Founded in 2012, the club won the North Korean top flight in the 2021-22 season after defeating powerhouses April 25 Sports Club.

Naegohyang also beat Suwon - their opponents on Wednesday - 3-0 in the Champions League group stage in November.

As the Champions League is a club competition, national flags and anthems will not be used during the match.

### The fans

North Koreans are not typically allowed in South Korea so no fans will travel across the border.

The visiting team will though have plenty of support.

Seoul's unification ministry will provide 300 million won (US\$200,000) to support South Korean civic groups planning to cheer both teams at the match.

It will cover tickets, cheering supplies and banners, a ministry official said, adding the event could help promote "mutual understanding between the two Koreas".

About 2,500 supporters are expected at the game, according to the unification ministry.

A ministry official said civic groups would "largely be left to decide for themselves" what they chant, but the government will give guidelines given the "special nature" of the event.

"We see it as a rare and meaningful exchange between young South and North Koreans," Hong Sang-young, secretary general of the civic group Korean Sharing Movement, told AFP.

"Political slogans or messages could cause misunderstandings, so we intend to focus on football itself and on supporting young people from both Koreas sharing the same space." — AFP

# No plans for PGA outside USA or moving off May date

## Golf

Jim Slater

NEWTOWN SQUARE, USA – The PGA Championship is not considering playing the event outside the United States or moving off its current May date, PGA of America officials said on Wednesday.

On the eve of the 108<sup>th</sup> PGA Championship at Aronimink, PGA of America chief executive officer Terry Clark and chief championships officer Kerry Haigh crushed any notion of such changes.

Regarding venues beyond US borders, Clark said the event's identity involves plenty of American courses.

"I don't see that being a real focus as far as right now. It's not something I really looked at and discussed," Clark said.

"I never say never because we're always trying to improve what we do, but I wouldn't put that as high priority at this point."

There has been talk about moving the PGA Championship back to August almost since it shifted from there to May in 2019, but Clark said sponsors and telecasters like May just fine.

"I really think we've got a strong position in May," Clark said. "Certainly, I'm always going to look at what could make us better, but not actively looking at should we move

this to later or back to August.

"I think we have a great slot. I think we can stand out."

Every four years, the Olympic golf tournament has a date in late July or early August. And the PGA Tour has shifted its schedule to stage its playoffs in August.

"There's a unique spot that we sit. I like that we don't have to think about changes for the Olympic years," Clark said.

"We've kind of come to (realise) there's a real way to not only continue to strengthen our identity, but to lean into that time in May, so I don't see that as one I'm really pushing on a change right now."

Haigh noted the tournament no

longer faces the scorching summer temperatures or thunderstorms that caused delays in the August window and it comes five weeks after the Masters with one major every month from April to July.

"It's certainly a lot more temperate, a lot more enjoyable for spectators and the experience for everyone involved," Haigh said. "May is a great date. It's five weeks after Augusta. There's a nice pacing for the majors."

"We like the May date and it seems agronomically to be working very well."

The tournament has posted a code of conduct in the locker room, a move started at the Masters after

consultation between the majors and top-level tours.

"We have adopted the code of conduct with the aim being similar to pace of play, in that the policy is written," Haigh said.

"If a player does something sort of egregious, unfortunately, we would give a warning to that player, and if they were to do it again, there would be a two-shot penalty."

"It's really for the good of the game that we're implementing it to try and make sure everyone is behaving appropriately, professionally, and as we would want our children and people watching to see (at) the major championship." – AFP

## Sinner breaks Masters 1000 winning streak record at Italian Open, Gauff in final

## Tennis

Terry Daley

ROME – Jannik Sinner reached the semi-finals of the Italian Open yesterday after seeing off Andrey Rublev and establishing a new record of consecutive wins in Masters 1000 tournaments.

Another straight-sets victory, this time 6-2, 6-4 over Rublev, moved Sinner up to 32 straight wins in the ATP's top-ranked events, one more than the previous record established by Novak Djokovic in 2011.

"I don't play for records, I play just for my own story," said Sinner on court.

"At the same time, it means a lot to me, but tomorrow is another day, another opponent, a different opponent."

Rublev was Sinner's first seeded opponent at this year's tournament in Rome and the world number one made short work of his task in front of a delighted centre court.

Today, Sinner will face Daniil Medvedev, winner of the 2023 title at the Foro Italico, with the seventh seed beating lucky loser Martin Landaluce in the first match of the evening session, 1-6, 4-6, 5-7.

Sinner looks near unbeatable at the moment and with his great rival Carlos Alcaraz out injured he is heavy favourite to become the first Italian to win the Rome title in five decades, with a potential career Grand Slam on the cards at the French Open.

Rublev offered little resistance, the Russian dropping his own serve in the first game of both sets to give Sinner a handy leg-up, and committing 28 unforced errors in 18 games.

Sinner meanwhile showed flashes of his best tennis but also started to look tired towards the end of the match, visibly touching his left thigh before confidently serving for the match.

"I'm starting to feel that I've been playing a lot, so I need to recover as much as possible because tomorrow

[today] will be very difficult," Sinner later told reporters.

"However, it goes it will be a win for me, if I win great but even if things don't go well that OK because I'll have a few more days to prepare for Paris which is my main objective this year."

## Gauff in final

Coco Gauff followed Sinner by reaching the Rome final for the second straight year after beating veteran Sorana Cirstea 6-4, 6-3.

The American star has struggled on clay this season, with a last-16 exit in the Madrid Open coming after a disappointing run to the quarter-finals in Stuttgart.

But she dealt with Romanian Cirstea - who is set to retire at the end of the year - professionally as spring sunshine burst out on centre court, helped by a marked improvement in her often erratic service game.

The 24-year-old made only one double fault and got 79 percent of her first serves in play, and cut a confident figure on court ahead of a potential title clash with a revitalised Iga Swiatek.

Gauff was beaten by Jasmine Paolini in the last year's final but could go one better ahead of her Roland Garros title defence.

Swiatek will bid to reach her first final of the year when she faces Elina Svitolina in the final match of the day on centre court.

A six-time Grand Slam champion, Swiatek has been out of sorts on clay since winning the last of her four French Open titles two years ago, but she has exploded back into her best form in Rome.

Since struggling through her second-round win against Caty McNally, Swiatek has dropped just seven games in three matches and looks back to her best on her preferred surface.

Swiatek recently took on board Francisco Roig, the former coach of men's clay-court icon Rafael Nadal, after a difficult opening few months of the season.

– AFP



Team Aprilia Racing's Jorge Martin, (from left to right) Team Aprilia Racing's Marco Bezzecchi and Team Gresini Racing MotoGP's Alex Marquez attend a press conference at the Catalunya racetrack in Montmelo, near Barcelona, yesterday, ahead of the Catalunya Moto GP Grand Prix.

– AFP

## China's Liu re-appointed ITTF Athletes' Commission co-chair

## Table tennis

BEIJING – The International Table Tennis Federation announced yesterday that China's Liu Shiwen and England's Paul Drinkhall have been appointed co-chairs of the Athletes' Commission following a vote at the commission's first meeting.

All 10 members of the newly elected commission took part in the meeting after the Athletes' Commission election earlier this month.

Liu, who previously served as co-chair of the commission, was reappointed to the role, while Drinkhall will serve for the first time. Both will represent athletes on the ITTF Executive Board.

Liu was part of China's gold medal-winning team at the 2016 Rio Olympic Games and claimed mixed doubles silver at the Tokyo Games in 2021. She also won the women's singles title at the 2019 World Table Tennis Championships

and captured a record five Women's World Cup titles.

Drinkhall, a three-time Olympian, competed at London 2012 in addition to the Rio and Tokyo Games. He won Commonwealth Games men's doubles gold in 2018 and 2022, and became the first English player to claim two singles titles on the ITTF World Tour, winning the Spanish Open in 2014 and the Serbia Open in 2019.

– Xinhua

## Sarah Taylor named England men's fielding coach

## Cricket

LONDON – Former England women's wicketkeeper Sarah Taylor has been named as fielding coach for the men's team during next month's Test series against New Zealand in a landmark appointment.

Taylor, a World Cup winner in 2017, recently worked as an assistant coach to Andrew Flintoff with the second-string England Lions men's team.

But the 36-year-old has broken new ground as the most senior female coach with a major England men's sports team.

Taylor, whom former Australia gloveman Adam Gilchrist once called the "best wicketkeeper in the world", joined the coaching staff of county side Sussex in 2021 and coached Hundred franchise Manchester Originals the following season.

In 2015, Taylor became the first woman to play first-grade, or senior club-level cricket, in Australia for Northern Districts.

Taylor will work with England in their three-Test series against New Zealand, starting on June 4.

"She's done a lot of work in the Lions," said England's managing director of men's cricket Rob Key.

"We've been thoroughly, unbelievably impressed with her and the way that she goes about her business."

"I just think she's one of the best in the business at what she does."

One of Taylor's former England teammates, Alex Hartley, has previously worked as a spin coach for Multan Sultans in the Pakistan Super League, with Ireland's Cath Dalton also on the staff as a fast-bowling coach.

In football, Marie-Louise Eta was named as interim boss of Bundesliga club Union Berlin in April while in tennis, Britain's three-time major champion Andy Murray worked with Amelie Mauresmo.

– AFP

## Emotional Vin Diesel leads 'Fast and Furious' tribute in Cannes

Adam Plowright

CANNES – An emotional Vin Diesel and teary “The Fast and the Furious” co-stars Michelle Rodriguez and Jordana Brewster soaked up applause at a special cast reunion at the Cannes Film Festival on Wednesday on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the original movie.

Speaking at a raucous midnight screening of the 2001 street-racing blockbuster, which Cannes supremo Thierry Frémaux hailed as a “classic”, the US actor and filmmaker paid tribute to late fellow driver Paul Walker.

Walker, who died in a car crash in 2013, was represented by his daughter, the actress and model Meadow Rain Walker, who shared a long hug with Diesel on the red carpet.

“The person who was not going to let me come alone here, to represent that brotherhood, was Meadow Rain,” Diesel said inside the full-capacity main cinema in Cannes.

“I’m going to go shed a tear real quick,” he added.

The Fast franchise, now an 11-movie series that has grossed more than US\$7 billion at the box office, is set to end with “Fast Forever” in 2028.

Diesel, 58, sounded surprised at the warmth of the tribute from Cannes tastemaker Frémaux who said the series “had become a classic” and had “left an enormous mark on the history of cinema”.

“To come with a film,

that you, the head of the most prestigious film festival in the world, where every artist in the world wants to be recognised, that you are calling this film we did 25 years ago a classic, how profound is that?” Diesel said.

Frémaux, who made bringing big American films to Cannes an early priority of his two-decade tenure, has been left without a major Hollywood blockbuster premiere for the 2026 edition.

Cannes typically relies on US studios providing some A-list razzle-dazzle to the event which otherwise focuses on independent, auteur cinema in its main competition.

But Hollywood majors such as Disney, Sony and Warner, as well as streaming giants Netflix and Amazon, have decided against launching films at Cannes this year.

The special screening of “The Fast and the Furious”, owned by Universal, was a late addition to the programme.

Reasons for the studios’ absence include cost-cutting, a growing preference for tightly controlled social media-led launches for their films and the risk that a mauling from the Cannes critics can doom a movie.

Diesel announced on Monday that “The Fast and the Furious” concept is being adapted into a television series by Universal without giving details about its release date. –AFP



Actor Vin Diesel poses for a photocall for the film “Fast and Furious” at the 79<sup>th</sup> edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France, on Wednesday. – Xinhua

## After the hobbits, director Peter Jackson tackles ‘Tintin’

Fiachra Gibbons

CANNES – “The Lord of the Rings” maestro Peter Jackson revealed on Wednesday that he is taking on another cult classic – “Tintin”.

The New Zealand director said that he has been working on a script for a film about the boy reporter created by the Belgian cartoonist Herge nearly a century ago.

Jackson said his film would be a sequel to Steven Spielberg’s animated film “The Adventures of Tintin” in 2011, which he co-produced.

“The deal was that Steven directs one and I direct another,” he said at the Cannes Film Festival, where he received an honorary Palme d’Or lifetime’s achievement award on Tuesday.

“So Steven did his film, then for 15 years I haven’t made mine. I feel very awkward about that,” he said. But he hasn’t been wasting any time while at Cannes.

In between galas and picking up his prize, “I’ve been working with Fran [Walsh, his partner] on another Tintin script.

“I’m in the hotel room down the road writing the script and sending pages to New Zealand,” he told AFP.

While he refused to say which of the Tintin albums he was drawing on, he hinted strongly that it will begin where Spielberg’s film finished, with “Red Rackham’s Treasure”.

“It’s not the way that it carries on, but it begins exactly where the last film ends,” he told AFP.

### ‘Old fat rebel’

Jackson said he makes “films that I really want to see myself”, and the Tintin movie will be no different.



New Zealand director, screenwriter and producer Peter Jackson displays his handprints during an induction ceremony at the Café des Palmes at the Palais des Festivals during the 79<sup>th</sup> edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France, on Wednesday. – AFP

“When we get a draft done we will send it to Steven [Spielberg]... and he might say that he doesn’t like it, and maybe we should do it with different books. But I don’t think he will.”

Jackson, who turned JRR Tolkien’s trilogy into one of the biggest box office franchises ever, said he loved Tintin, whose adventurous japes in comics like “Tintin in Tibet” and “The Blue Lotus” have been a staple of European children’s bookshelves since the 1930s.

Jackson, who owns Weta FX, one of the world’s most important special effects companies, which has worked on “Avatar” as well as “The Lord of the Rings” trilogy, also weighed into the debate on artificial intelligence (AI) that has been raging at Cannes.

He said that while he thought AI is “going to destroy the world”, when it comes to its use in film, “I don’t dislike it at all.”

“I mean, to me, it’s just a special effect. It’s no different from other special effects.”

While he later played down his remarks “about the robots taking over”, he said he could not see AI going much further than the “cowboyland” of short videos on Instagram and YouTube.

“To make feature films the rights have all to be authorised and lawyers have to go through things with a toothcomb,” something that would limit AI’s use.

Jackson, 64, said he still sees himself as the rebel who was kicked out of the Palais des Festivals in Cannes for wearing shorts when he premiered his debut film, “Bad Taste” in 1987, but was now an “old fat rebel”.

And he said he still hopes to make a movie inspired by the British Dambusters raid on the Ruhr dams in Germany during World War II if “I live long enough”. –AFP

## U2 surprise fans in Mexico City to shoot music video

MEXICO CITY – Irish legends U2 stunned locals and tourists in Mexico City’s historic centre on Wednesday as the quartet filmed a music video for their upcoming single.

The rock band, led by Bono, were perched on a rustic truck whose windshield read “La Calle de los Sueños” (“Street of Dreams”), the name of their new track.

Heavy rain that lashed the Mexican capital on Tuesday had caused damage to a generator used for the shoot and forced the musicians to make a dash for shelter in a nearby house.

“The thunder and rain crashed the generator for the film shoot, which meant a bewildered but welcoming neighbour let the U2ers crash their apartment at dinner time and out to their balcony,” the band posted on their Instagram.

A video showed the group giving an impromptu performance from the balcony in the pouring rain to the delight of plastic poncho-clad crowds below

Some fans had been summoned



U2 singer Paul Hewson, known as Bono, waves to fans outside the Metropolitan Palace during the second day of recording of its music video in downtown Mexico City on Wednesday. – AFP

in advance via social media to play extras in the music video, while others arrived at the last minute to catch a glimpse of the famous rockers.

“Getting an autograph from them is amazing,” 48-year-old fan “Tete” Urban told AFP, proudly displaying his guitar signed by The Edge. “It’s pure gold to me.”

Mexico City’s Mayor Clara

Brugada met the band on Wednesday, posted on X: “In the name of love, I greeted Bono, The Edge, Adam Clayton, and Larry Mullen Jr.”

She shared a video of herself inviting the group to perform on the Zócalo, the capital’s main square, which has hosted legends such as Paul McCartney and Roger Waters.

– AFP

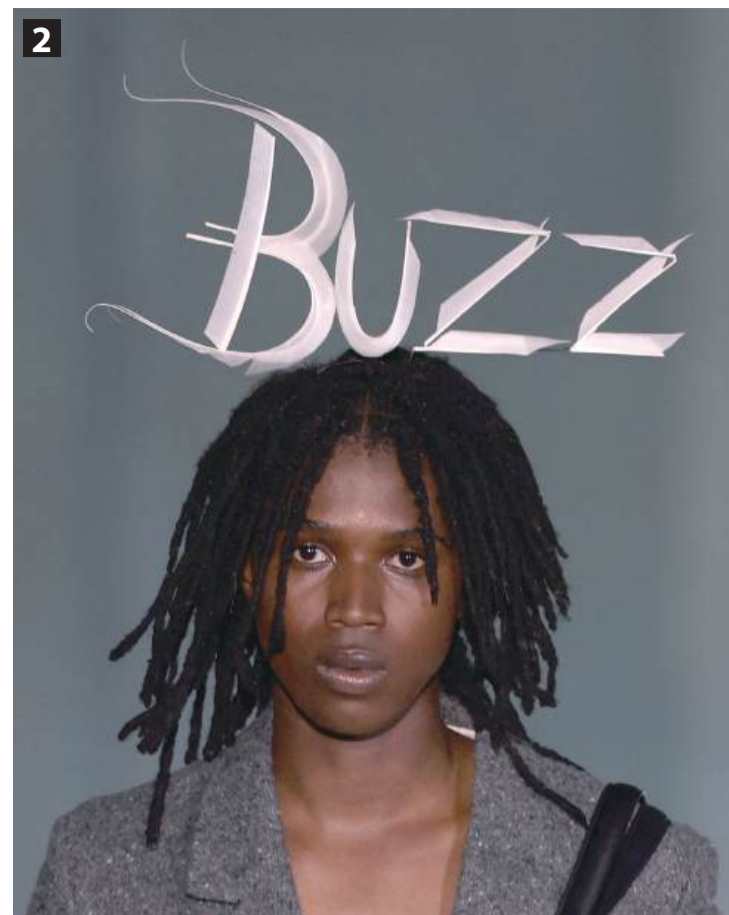
### World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 18°C~31°C	Manila 25°C~35°C	New York 12°C~20°C	Lisbon 11°C~20°C
Shanghai 18°C~28°C	Bangkok 26°C~35°C	London 5°C~14°C	Rio de Janeiro 21°C~26°C
Hong Kong 23°C~27°C	Tokyo 12°C~25°C	Frankfurt 4°C~14°C	Luanda 21°C~26°C
Taipei 22°C~27°C	Singapore 25°C~31°C	Vancouver 7°C~11°C	Maputo 17°C~28°C
Guangzhou 23°C~29°C	Kuala Lumpur 25°C~33°C	Paris 5°C~13°C	Dili 24°C~32°C
Nanjing 17°C~29°C	Jakarta 24°C~32°C	Moscow 12°C~21°C	São Tomé 26°C~31°C
Guilin 20°C~30°C	Seoul 16°C~32°C	Las Vegas 20°C~37°C	Praia 19°C~27°C
Xi’an 18°C~27°C	Sydney 13°C~21°C	Monte Carlo 11°C~18°C	Bissau 19°C~34°C



### 1. For the birds

Visitors view "Amalgam" by US artist Nick Cave, during the pre-opening of the 61<sup>st</sup> Venice Art Biennale in Venice last Wednesday. - AFP



### 2. Buzzing along

A model walks the runway during the Dior 2027 Cruise collection fashion show at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) in Los Angeles on Wednesday. - AFP

### 3. Cool kissers

Capybaras cool down in the water during a heat wave with temperatures between 35 and 37 degrees Celsius in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico last Wednesday. - AFP



### 4. Ghostly apparition

Lithuanian singer Lion Ceccah, representing Lithuania with the song 'Solo Quiero Mas', (I only want more), performs during the first semi-final of the Eurovision Song Contest 2026 (ESC) at Wiener Stadthalle in Vienna, Austria on Tuesday. - AFP



### 5. Splish, splash

Giant panda Lun Lun is pictured at the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, on Wednesday. - Xinhua



### 6. Monochrome crisps

Bags of Calbee potato crisps, sample packages with a black-and-white design (bottom) and the current orange and yellow packaging (top), are displayed at the company's headquarters in Tokyo yesterday.

Japan's leading crisp maker is feeling the crunch from shortages related to the Iran war and is swapping its signature orange-and-yellow packets for black and white, reports said. - AFP

