

Govt to start 90-day Friendship Bridge maintenance project Saturday



This photo taken yesterday shows Macau's Friendship Bridge in the Outer Harbour. – Photo: Armindo Neves

Armindo Neves

The government's Road Works Coordination Group yesterday announced a 90-day maintenance project on Friendship Bridge starting this Saturday, during which the number of lanes on the approach roads at both ends of the bridge will be reduced from two to one.

The group hosted a press conference yesterday at the Transport Bureau's (DSAT) headquarters on Estrada de D. Maria II. The cross-departmental group consists of DSAT, the Public Works Bureau (DSOP), the Public Security Police (PSP), Macao Post and Telecommunications Bureau (CTT), the Marine and Water Bureau (DSAMA), and the Environmental Protection Bureau (DSPA).

According to a statement released during the press conference, it has been 25 years since the Friendship Bridge last underwent major maintenance.

The statement noted that the asphalt layer on the bridge deck is severely worn, and potholes frequently appear around the expansion joints of the approach roads after rain, posing potential safety hazards to motorists.

Maintenance work on the bridge deck facilities will be carried out from May 23 to mid-August, the statement said, adding that construction will primarily cover the southern and northern approach roads. This will include resurfacing the asphalt on the carriageway and replacing the expansion joints. Following this, repairs to the main bridge sections will proceed in phases, depending on traffic conditions.

The statement also noted that heavy vehicles account for between 20 to nearly 40 percent of the traffic volume on the bridge. In order to facilitate the roadworks while maintaining public mobility, the coordination team has decided to implement phased measures starting at 10 a.m. on Saturday.

The approaches to the bridge in both the north and south directions will be reduced to single-lane traffic in stages. Vehicles with a gross weight exceeding 3.5 tonnes – excluding public buses – will be prohibited from using the bridge.

The statement suggested that affected drivers use the new Macau Bridge or other bridges to travel between Macau and Taipa, aiming to balance the needs of the maintenance project and public transport.

According to previous reports in the *Post*, the four-lane Friendship Bridge, the second Macau-Taipa link, opened to traffic in 1994. The bridge has two connecting viaducts on the peninsula. One is the viaduct from Avenida da Amizade near the Outer Harbour Ferry Terminal, while the other is from the north-eastern coast of Areia Preta district.

Meanwhile, the group also announced in the statement a raft of roadworks planned for this summer.

According to the statement, nine large-scale projects will start this summer. Following extensive discussions, these projects have been consolidated, the statement said. As they involve routes frequently used by students commuting to and from school, work will be carried out between late May and August during schools' summer holiday.

To prepare for potentially adverse weather conditions such as typhoons and heavy rain during the summer break, the statement said the nine projects will be carried out concurrently to accelerate the pace of the roadworks and minimise the overall timeline.

The government aims to complete the work and restore traffic flow before the start of the new school year in September, thereby ensuring stable traffic conditions for the upcoming academic term, the statement said. ■

Putin's China visit expected to further advance ties: FM spokesperson

BEIJING – President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin will exchange views on bilateral ties, cooperation in various fields, as well as international and regional issues of mutual interest, during Putin's upcoming visit to China, a foreign ministry spokesperson said yesterday.

Putin will pay a state visit to China today and tomorrow at the invitation of Xi. This will be President Putin's 25th visit to China, foreign ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said at a regular news briefing.

"The two sides will take this visit as an opportunity to continue to promote the development of China-Russia relations to a higher level, which will inject greater stability and positive energy into the world," Guo said. (Commentary about Putin visit on p.6) – Xinhua

Musk loses blockbuster OpenAI suit as jury says too late

OAKLAND – A federal jury ruled yesterday that Elon Musk waited too long to sue OpenAI and its co-founders, delivering a decisive victory to OpenAI CEO Sam Altman and ending one of Silicon Valley's most closely watched courtroom battles.

The jury in Oakland federal court found that Musk's claims against Altman, OpenAI President Greg Brockman, The OpenAI Foundation and Microsoft were barred by relevant statutes of limitations, rejecting the billionaire's core arguments.

Judge Yvonne Gonzalez Rogers, who had asked the jury to advise her on the matter, accepted and confirmed the verdict.

The three-week trial saw a parade of tech titans take the stand, with Musk

arguing that OpenAI's pivot to a profit-driven business betrayed its original nonprofit mandate.

The outcome spares OpenAI from a potentially existential legal threat.

Had Musk prevailed, he was seeking to force the company to revert to its nonprofit structure – a move that would have derailed its planned IPO and unwound ties to major investors including Microsoft, Amazon and SoftBank, who have poured billions into the company amid the global AI race.

Musk, the world's richest person, had sued OpenAI over its transformation from a scrappy nonprofit into the US\$850 billion juggernaut behind ChatGPT, claiming Altman and Brockman improperly used a US\$38 million

donation he had intended to sustain OpenAI as a research lab devoted to developing AI for the benefit of humanity.

The jury first had to resolve a threshold issue: whether Musk, who filed suit in 2024 – four years after his last contribution – had done so within the statutory time limit.

It found he had not, ending the case before jurors could weigh the underlying merits.

Had the case proceeded, jurors – and ultimately the judge – would have determined whether OpenAI's co-founders misappropriated Musk's donations and broke promises to him in order to pursue a commercial path and enrich themselves. – AFP



Macau's most popular English-language newspaper – Your trustworthy source of news & views

The Macau Post Daily

China's position on Taiwan region's participation in activities of int'l organizations clear: FM spokesperson

– Story on p. 7

WHO declares int'l emergency as Ebola outbreak kills more than 80 in DR Congo

The WHO declared an international health emergency on Sunday over an outbreak of an Ebola strain in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) that has killed more than 80 and for which there is no vaccine. – Story on p. 11

Cape Verde opposition wins parliamentary elections: preliminary results

Cape Verde's main opposition party has won parliamentary elections with 46 percent of the vote, according to provisional results published yesterday. – Story on p. 12

Int'l Children's Day activities to promote children's participation rights

Khalel Vallo

A series of activities celebrating International Children's Day will be held across Macau this year under the theme of children's participation rights, with organisers aiming to raise public awareness of children's rights and wellbeing while fostering a festive atmosphere in the community, according to a statement by Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) yesterday.

The "2026 International Children's Day" activities were announced yesterday by the International Children's Day Organising Committee, which is composed of the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS), the Legal Affairs Bureau (DSAJ), the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ), and the Sports Bureau (ID), the statement said.

This year's programme centres on participation rights as outlined in the "Convention on the Rights of the Child", striving to encourage greater public attention towards children's

voices and welfare, the statement said, adding that a total of 18 co-organising entities are participating in the initiative, including the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO), Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL), and Commission Against Corruption (CCAC).

Among the featured events is a cultural performance involving primary school students and members of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Macao Garrison, scheduled to take place on May 31 at the PLA Taipa Barracks.

According to the statement, 600 local primary school students are expected to participate in the event, which will include performances and interactive activities between students and military personnel. The statement noted that the programme aims to allow children to experience the festive spirit while promoting patriotism and national awareness.

On International Children's Day itself on June 1, the statement noted



This poster provided by the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) yesterday promotes the various activities marking the June 1 International Children's Day to be held across Macau around that time.

that the committee will also distribute gifts to children receiving treatment at the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre and the private Kiang Wu Hospital, adding that the initiative is intended to convey the care and blessings of the local government and different sectors of society to

hospitalised children.

In addition, several community carnival events will be organised by the Macau Federation of Trade Unions (FAOM), Caritas Macau, the General Union of Neighbourhood Associations of Macau (UGAMM) and the Women's General

Association of Macau (commonly known as Fu Luen in Cantonese), with residents invited to take part in the celebrations, the statement noted.

The series of events aims to create a joyful Children's Day atmosphere while further promoting awareness of children's rights and encouraging broader community participation in issues concerning children's wellbeing, the statement concluded. ■

* Children's participation rights refer to the fundamental principle that children and young people have the right to freely express their views on all matters affecting them, and that those views must be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity. This concept is primarily grounded in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). It shifts the perception of children from passive recipients of care and protection to active "subjects of rights" and citizens. – Gemini

Gongbei Customs seizes 132 cigars, 200 cigarettes and 56 cosmetics at HZMB



These two undated handout photos provided by Zhuhai Gongbei Customs yesterday shows cigars, cigarettes and cosmetics seized by its officers at the HZMB on May 4 and 7, respectively.

Armindo Neves

Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs announced in a statement yesterday that its officers seized 132 cigars at the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge Zhuhai checkpoint on May 4.

According to the statement, on that day, customs officers, while conducting a routine inspection at the checkpoint, noticed that a Macau single-plate vehicle was following an unusual trajectory.

They stopped the vehicle for inspection, the statement said, adding that upon further examination, customs officers discovered 132 undeclared "Montecristo" brand cigars were

concealed in the boot of the vehicle.

Gongbei Customs reminded the public in the statement that tobacco products are restricted items for entry into the Chinese mainland. For frequent cross-border travellers (those who enter the Chinese mainland more than once within a 15-day period), the customs may grant duty-free clearance for up to two cigars.

Meanwhile, Zhuhai Gongbei Customs announced in a separate statement yesterday that its officers seized 200 cigarettes and 56 cosmetics products at Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) Zhuhai checkpoint on May 7.

According to the statement, customs officers at the checkpoint, while conduction supervision at the checkpoint, noticed that a traveller using the "green channel" was walking at a brisk pace.

They stopped the traveller for inspection, the statement said, adding that the officers discovered that the inner layer of a black coat the passenger was carrying contained a large number of concealed pockets that had been sewn into it.

Upon further inspection, a total of 200 cigarettes, along with a batch of cosmetics such as eye cream, face cream and serum* – totalling 56 containers – were found inside the sewn pockets.

In the statement, Gongbei Customs reminded the public that according to relevant regulations, evading customs supervision by hiding or bringing goods subject to taxes into the mainland constitutes smuggling. If the circumstances are severe enough to constitute a crime, criminal liability will be pursued. ■

*In skincare, a serum is a lightweight, highly concentrated topical product designed to deliver specific active ingredients directly into the skin. – Gemini

4 Filipinos arrested for selling drugs to compatriots

Tony Wong

Four Filipinos, one of them a Hong Kong resident, have been arrested in Macau for allegedly selling drugs to their compatriots since last month, Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Cheong Kim Fong announced during a special press conference yesterday.

The Philippine Hong Kong resident reportedly smuggled drugs regularly from Hong Kong to Macau to supply a non-resident worker (NRW), who then instructed two other Filipinos to distribute them to compatriots within the city.

According to Cheong, the Judiciary Police received a tip-off last month regarding a Filipino drug ring operating in Macau. Investigators subsequently identified the Hong Kong suspect as a 52-year-old IT technician surnamed Rosario.

PJ officers placed Rosario under surveillance after he entered Macau via the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) on Sunday morning. He travelled to the peninsula's central district, where he met the second suspect – a 31-year-old bartender and NRW surnamed Ching – in the street.

Police intercepted the pair and seized two e-cigarette cartridges from Rosario. The cartridges,

weighing a total of 12.31 grams, contained ketamine and etomidate. Officers also confiscated drug packaging materials, drug taking paraphernalia, and HK\$2,800 in cash.

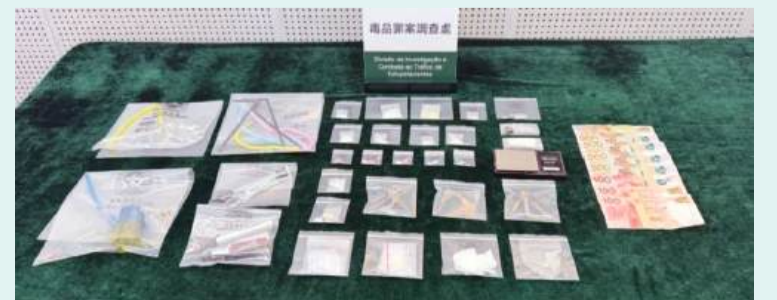
Etomidate is the primary active ingredient in a new illicit substance known by the street name "space oil".

Cheong said that the police escorted Ching to his nearby home for a search. There, they seized nine bags of "ice" (methamphetamine) weighing a total of 10.01 grams, an electronic scale, and further drug taking paraphernalia. Two other Filipinos were intercepted at the flat: Ching's 33-year-old brother, who entered Macau as a visitor, and a 39-year-old waiter and NRW surnamed Gonzales.

Following an investigation, police confirmed that Rosario had been smuggling drugs from Hong Kong since last month to supply the younger Ching, who then used the other two men to sell the drugs.

All four suspects tested positive for drugs. The total haul of 22.32 grams has an estimated street value of 31,600 patacas.

The quartet has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing charges of drug trafficking and consumption. ■



Evidence seized in the drug case involving four Filipinos is displayed at the pressroom of the PJ headquarters yesterday. – Photo: PJ

Published since Aug 2004

- Director & Chief Editor – Harald Brüning
- Office Manager – Sally Cheong
- Marketing Manager – Kevin Cheung King Lok
- Managing Editor – Maria Cheang Ut Meng
- Editors – Lesley Wells, Johnny Un
- Senior Reporters – Tony Wong, Rui Pastorin
- Reporters – Khalel Vallo, William Chan, Ida Cheong, Armindo Neves
- Chief Graphic Designer – Simon Wang
- Graphic Designer – Colin Zhong
- Administrative Assistants – Ester Mak, Carl Leong
- Printed by Tipografia Welfare Lda., 82-86 Rua dos Pescadores
- Chatbots: DeepSeek, Gemini, Poe
- Wire services – AFP, Xinhua

Macau Weather

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



24°C~28°C

Source: SMG

Inclusion Conference & Festival kicks off 1st day of discussions & activities

Rui Pastorin

Keynote speeches, art workshops, and consultation sessions directly between parents and experts took place at MGM COTAI for the first day of the free-admission Inclusion Conference & Festival, a key platform for neurodiversity, inclusive education, and mental health dialogue.

Yesterday's first day of the conference, supported by integrated resort operator MGM, gathered over 300 participants ranging from healthcare practitioners to parents from Macau, elsewhere in the Greater Bay Area (GBA) and other parts of the world.

Internationally known speakers at yesterday's keynote sessions tackled topics from a functional medicine approach to Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) to designing communities of belonging.

The consultation and support sessions meanwhile saw over 100 in attendance, according to a statement provided after yesterday's event. Other event highlights were the long-running "Creating Something Out of Nothing" inclusion programme where individuals with intellectual disabilities, artists, educators, and mental health professionals created artworks to be adapted into race-track visuals for the Macau Motorcycle Grand Prix in November, the statement said.

Reflecting on the event, Inclusion Conference & Festival co-founder and organiser Stefan Kuehn told reporters yesterday that it all started with the golf tournament organised for those with special needs, recognising that more and more parents, caretakers and coaches had an increasingly urgent need to meet each other, and exchange ideas or experiences, fears, and challenges that they have.

"And then we realised the real tragedies are actually the parents behind", most giving up their whole lives to be there for their child. "We realised there is a huge, huge demand of finding help". He also noted that there are also challenges related to stigma, as well as communicating complex neurodiversity expertise from top professionals to parents in a clear, understandable way.

The conference is now in its 8th edition, while the golfing event is in its 11th. On its gradual development and increase in attendance, he said: "Five, six, seven years ago, it was very, very hard to convince the parents to come out here and basically meet people that are willing to help, to introduce themselves, their research, saying 'hey, we are here, we are helping you'. They saw our real mission and we thought we should concentrate

on the locals" as well as make a connection to Hong Kong, "which is much more advanced and so many international researchers and clinics are actually there."

Answering follow-up questions by the *Post* after the interview, Kuehn said the organisers hope that they can receive more support from Macau, as well as "to be seen that we are here for the locals", and for the local government to understand that the event has a lot to offer, being one event that "really promotes Macau all around the world." In this regard, he noted examples of positive reception from event participants regarding their experience and media coverage. "This is amazing to see", he said, hoping that the government can recognise the event and its positive outcomes and extend it "because it's simply a different event. And it really promotes diversification because it has everything".

The conference continues today at School of The Nations (SON) and hosted by Melco Resorts & Entertainment. Meanwhile, Macau Golf Masters, which will feature elite golfers with neurodiversity and physical disabilities from around the world, at the Macau International Golf (MIG) is slated to start tomorrow, featuring a record number of 201 participants. ■

Inclusion Conference & Festival co-founder and organiser Stefan Kuehn delivers a speech prior to the launch of yesterday's activities at MGM COTAI.



Participants, guests and representatives pose for a group photo during yesterday's "Creating Something Out of Nothing" activity. - Photos: Rui Pastorin

主辦單位: Organizer




2026

金沙物美

Sands Shopping Carnival 嘉年華

誠邀本澳中小微企免費參展

Free participation for local SMEs

報名截止日期 **29/05/2026**

Registration Deadline

(853) 2855 5000 info@macexpo.com.mo

日期: 7月23日-26日
Dates: July 23-26

地址: 澳門威尼斯人金光會展A及B館
Venue: Cotai Expo Halls A & B, The Venetian Macao

全澳最大規模消費折扣展

The Largest Discount Sale in Macao



立即報名
Apply Now



'Ink as Void' exhibition transforms calligraphy into immersive spatial art

Khalel Vallo

"Ink as Void" opened at CREATIVE MACAU (CCI) in Nape last week, aiming to present a contemporary dialogue between calligraphy, literature and spatial art through the works of Macau-based artist Xi Di.

Blending ink, installation, video and mixed media, the exhibition reinterprets traditional calligraphy as an immersive and interactive visual experience. According to the event booklet, the exhibition positions ink as a bridge connecting text, poetry and spatial installation.

Rather than treating calligraphy solely as written language, Xi transforms brushstrokes into structural and environmental elements, allowing audiences to "feel" the exhibits as spaces to inhabit instead of merely reading them.

Addressing the opening ceremony, Paulo Canelas de Castro, president of the Centre for Creative Industries, welcomed guests to the opening ceremony and praised Xi Di's ability to bring together different artistic disciplines within a short preparation period. He noted that the exhibition demonstrates the artist's versatility through the combination of calligraphy, poetry, installations, and spatial experimentation, creating what he described as a "holistic approach" to artistic expression.

Castro said the works reflect both technical skill and conceptual depth, with written language becoming part of the physical and visual environment of the gallery, highlighting that the exhibition embodies the mission of Creative Macau in providing a platform for local artists to showcase their talent and creativity. Describing Xi Di as "an outstanding talent in this community," Castro said the exhibition itself was proof of the artist's originality and artistic strength.

Rather than elaborating extensively on the exhibition's concept, Castro encouraged attendees to hear directly from the artist, whom he said "deserves to be heard, listened to and appreciated," while thanking the public for supporting local art and participating in the opening ceremony.

Xi said in his speech that he had recently spent days reflecting on how artistic creation could be expressed through "different materials, different concepts and different spaces". Elaborating on one of his installations, Xi said the work used ink as an adhesive element, adding that words and poems were attached to materials before being torn away, creating what he described as a "double-layered work".

Xi also noted that several works were created or modified directly within the exhibition space, allowing room for spontaneity and unexpected developments during the installation process. Xi added that some of his poems were intentionally concealed within the exhibition as interactive elements for visitors to discover. "It becomes like a game space", he said, adding that "the poems can even become a platform or a red carpet for people to walk on".

Running through May 30, the exhibits are on display at the CREATIVE MACAU gallery on the ground floor of the Macau Cultural Centre (CCM) in Nape with free admission Monday to Saturday, between 2 p.m. and 7 p.m.



Photos: Khalel Vallo

Govt urges residents, health workers to be vigilant against Ebola

Tony Wong

The Macau Health Bureau (SSM) is urging residents and private medical institutions to stay vigilant against the potentially deadly Ebola virus disease*, after the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the ongoing Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Uganda a Public Health Emergency of International Concern.

The bureau said in a statement last night that it has started launching various new measures with the aim of enhancing Macau's capabilities to prevent the disease.

According to the statement, the new measures have been launched in three main aspects, namely health inspection measures at border checkpoints, at medical institutions and at the community level.

The statement said that the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre activated its response mechanism and epidemic prevention preparations yesterday, fully implementing all necessary infection control measures, while seminars on epidemic prevention have been held for frontline healthcare workers, covering topics such as the current epidemiological situation of the Ebola virus disease, triage and screening mechanisms, notification and sample submission procedures, infection control and prevention measures, and the correct donning and doffing of personal protective equipment (PPE).

Border checkpoints

Concerning measures at border checkpoints, the statement underlined, the Health Bureau, in collaboration with the Public Security Police (PSP), has strengthened health inspection measures against Ebola at all major border checkpoints.

According to the statement, health inspection personnel at border checkpoints will question and check all individuals

holding passports from the countries affected by the ongoing Ebola outbreak.

If a person travelling from a country affected by Ebola presents with symptoms suggestive of the Ebola virus disease, they will be immediately transferred to the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre for further assessment and examination, the statement said, adding that those without symptoms will be subject to health monitoring by the Macau Health Bureau.

The statement also said that notices have been posted in border checkpoints' arrival halls, urging asymptomatic individuals with a travel or contact history in countries affected by Ebola to report to the Health Bureau, with the aim of further strengthening Macau's health screening for people arriving in Macau from affected countries or those arriving in Macau after taking transit flights through these countries.

The statement also underlined that Macau has long maintained a comprehensive infectious disease surveillance and border health quarantine mechanism, according to which body temperature monitoring and health assessments are conducted on travellers at all major border checkpoints, enabling early detection of individuals with fever or related symptoms.

Healthcare system

In terms of new measures in Macau's healthcare system in response to the Ebola threat, the statement said, the Health Bureau has reviewed its existing guidelines for the prevention and control of the Ebola virus disease and has issued its latest guidelines to private medical institutions, urging frontline healthcare workers to ask patients with suspected symptoms about their travel history within the 21 days prior to the onset of symptoms, so as to facilitate early detection and notification of suspected cases.

In addition, the statement said, the Health Bureau will continue improving its contingency plans in response to the Ebola threat, ensuring sufficient capacity to address relevant risks.

The Health Bureau has also required all medical institutions to review their isolation facilities, patient transfer mechanisms, and infection control practices, with the aim of ensuring that response measures can be activated quickly and safely in the event of a suspected case, so as to prevent virus transmission within the healthcare environment.

Community level

At the community level, the statement said, the Health Bureau has strengthened its public education and awareness efforts, using various channels such as infographics and new media to help residents understand the current risks, transmission routes, and preventive measures for the Ebola virus disease.

The statement urged residents to avoid travelling to countries affected by the Ebola virus disease unless absolutely necessary. If travel is unavoidable, the statement said, they should pay extra attention to personal hygiene and avoid contact with patients' bodily fluids and wild animals.

After returning to Macau, they should monitor their own health conditions, and seek immediate medical treatment and report their travel history if they feel unwell. (More on p.11) ■

*The name Ebola is derived from the Ebola River in the northern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire). The virus was discovered near the river in 1976. On average, the case fatality rate (CFR) is approximately 50 percent. - Gemini

Inbound Voluntary Health Declaration Ebola Virus Disease

If you have visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo or Uganda within the last 21 days, or if you experience any of the following symptoms, please voluntarily declare to the Health Bureau staff at the checkpoint.

- Fever
- Intradermal bleeding
- Unexplained bleeding

What is Ebola Virus Disease?

Know the Disease

Ebola Virus Disease is a severe, often fatal acute viral hemorrhagic illness.

Endemic areas: Mainly distributed in remote villages in the tropical rainforests of Central and West Africa.

Outbreaks have also been reported in other parts of Africa, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire, Uganda, and Congo.

Incubation period: 2 to 21 days

For details, please visit the Health Bureau Infectious Disease Information webpage: [http://www.ssm.gov.mo](#)

The two posters released by the Health Bureau (SSM) last night show information on health declaration at border checkpoints and the Ebola virus disease. The AI-translated English texts were arranged by the Post.

Macau wins Asia's Best Luxury Destination award

Rui Pastorin

The Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) said in a statement on Friday that Macau recently won Asia's Best Luxury Destination award at the LUXE Asia 2026 award ceremony in Shanghai

The statement added that the event was tailored for luxury outbound tourism operators from across the Chinese mainland, Southeast Asia and Russia, gathering 38 "well-known international hotel groups and high-end product suppliers from around the world".

The statement also highlighted that, according to the Statistics and Census Bureau (DSEC), Russian visitor arrivals "surged" year on year by 84.5 percent in the first quarter of this year, while over 50 percent were young and middle-aged travellers aged between 25 and 44, which the statement described as "affluent consumers".

MGTO then supported the "Design Travel Tradeshow Macao 2026" organised in Macau, which brought together 60 luxury consumers from Russia and about 120 local and overseas tourism businesses. MGTO also arranged Russian-speaking tour guides, to give participants an insight into Macau's community resources tailored to Russian luxury visitors.

Meanwhile, the statement added that the 12th Destination Wedding Planners Congress (DWP Congress) was convened in Macau for the first time in April, with MGTO as a supporting partner. The event

engaged over 300 wedding planners and hoteliers from over 70 countries worldwide, the statement said, with MGTO engaging in and arranging various activities. ■



This photo provided by the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) on Friday shows an unidentified awardee acknowledging a prize during the recent LUXE Asia 2026 in Shanghai.

A TASTE OF BANGKOK

曼谷風情

Experience the soul of Thai gastronomy, masterfully interpreted by Executive Chef Sutthaporn Chulavachana, from refined royal dishes to vibrant street flavours.

探索泰國飲食文化的精髓，由泰國行政總廚 Sutthaporn Chulavachana 匠心主理，從宮廷御膳的優雅細膩，到曼谷街頭的傳奇風味，帶您品味泰式料理靈魂的深情詮釋。

From MOP 澳門幣 88+ 起

NAAM THAI RESTAURANT

T +853 8793 4818

Discover More 探索更多

5.2 quake hits Liunan, 504 km northwest of Macau

Rui Pastorin

The local observatory announced in a statement yesterday that at 9:44 p.m. a magnitude 5.2 earthquake occurred in Liunan

District, Liuzhou City, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

The statement said that the focal depth was approximately 10 kilometres, while the

epicentre was located at approximately 24.37 degrees north latitude and 109.26 degrees east longitude, about 504 kilometres west-northwest of Macau.

A journalist at a local newspaper office noted that some of the members of editorial team said that they had felt the temblor, which lasted for a few seconds. ■

China, Russia eye deeper ties ahead of Putin's visit to Beijing

Exchanges underscore vital role of heads-of-state diplomacy in steering relations

Global Times Commentary

China and Russia are preparing for another high-level diplomatic moment, with Russian President Vladimir Putin set to pay a state visit to China today and tomorrow. Ahead of the visit, both sides signaled strong expectations – yesterday in Beijing, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson said that China and Russia will continue deepening and elevating relations between China and Russia to inject more stability and positive energy to the world, while in Moscow, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia has “very serious expectations” for the trip.

Over recent years, under the strategic guidance of President Xi Jinping and President Putin, the China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era has enjoyed sound, steady and in-depth development, with expanding cooperation in various fields, tangible benefits for the two countries and two peoples, and important contribution to maintaining global strategic stability and upholding international fairness and justice, said Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun.

Also yesterday, Russian Presidential Spokesman Peskov stressed that expectations from the Russian leader's upcoming visit to China are very serious. He said that any contacts between the Russian president and President Xi help to give a new impetus for the further development and expansion of relations between the two countries, according to Russian News Agency Tass.

Chinese observers noted that the two-day visit by Putin and high-level exchanges demonstrate the high stability and steady high-level development of China-Russia ties under the regular heads-of-state meeting mechanism, and underscore the vital role of heads-of-state diplomacy in steering bilateral ties as well as the strong continuity of the strategic coordination and practical cooperation between the two countries amid profound shifts in the international landscape.

Consolidating bilateral foundations

“It will be President Putin's 25th visit to China, during which the two presidents will exchange views on bilateral relations, cooperation in various fields and international and regional issues of mutual interest,” said Guo while briefing on Putin's upcoming visit.

The spokesperson added that the two sides will take this opportunity to continue deepening and elevating relations between China and Russia, so as to inject more stability and positive energy to the world.

According to Tass, Peskov told yesterday's briefing that Russia's delegation “will include all relevant deputy prime ministers, many ministers, and heads of state and private companies operating in China.”

Relations between Russia and China are diverse. In addition to trade and economic cooperation, we are actively developing our dialogue in the field of education. Incidentally, a Year of Russian-Chinese Cooperation in Education will be launched, according to Peskov, per Tass.

Timed to coincide with major bilateral anniversaries, Putin's visit falls in the year



Visitors interact with a humanoid robot at the 10th China-Russia Expo in Harbin, Heilongjiang Province, on Sunday. The event, which opened Sunday, features more than 1,500 enterprises from 46 countries across a 55,000-square-meter exhibition space. – Xinhua

which marks the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the China-Russia strategic partnership of coordination and the 25th anniversary of the signing of the China-Russia Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation, while also marking the launch of the China-Russia Years of Education.

The visit embodies the mutually acknowledged principle of the right way for major countries to get along with each other, with both sides set to further chart bilateral ties along this path during President Putin's visit, Li Yongquan, director of the Eurasian Social Development Research at the Development Research Center of the State Council, told the *Global Times* yesterday.

With this year marking the 25th anniversary of the China-Russia Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation, the expert emphasized that the bilateral relationship is based on the principles of non-alliance, non-confrontation, and not targeting any third party.

Against three pivotal junctures, Wang Xiaquan, an expert with the Institute of Russian, Eastern European and Central Asian Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said that China-Russia relations rest on a solid foundation forged over years of steady development, adding that the two countries have built robust bilateral ties underpinned by sound communication and consultation mechanisms, as well as a comprehensive legal and treaty framework.

Multiple Russian media outlets reported that a joint statement along with a number of bilateral intergovernmental, interdepartmental, and other agreements, will be signed following the talks. The statement released by the Kremlin also mentioned “trade and economic cooperation.”

Developing bilateral ties stems fundamentally from the genuine needs of both countries rather than expedient moves subject to external influences, Wang said.

Against this backdrop, the two sides

will likely conduct new communications and consultations on further consolidating the foundation of bilateral relations and expanding areas of strategic coordination, Wang continued.

Frequent engagement

With President Putin's visit to China on the horizon, bilateral engagement continues to thrive, as seen in the ongoing 10th China-Russia Expo in Harbin. Nearly 300 Russian enterprises are participating in the event, displaying achievements in high-end manufacturing, energy equipment, modern agriculture and digital technologies. Its procurement group is expected to exceed 5,000 people, the Xinhua News Agency reported yesterday.

Chen Shijun, president of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade Heilongjiang Committee, said China-Russia economic and trade cooperation has expanded beyond traditional sectors such as energy and minerals into emerging industries, including the digital economy, green development and cross-border e-commerce, per Xinhua.

Russian media outlet TASS reported that high-quality Russian handicrafts are generating immense interest among visitors at the Expo in Harbin. Orenburg, Pavlovo Posad, and modern silk scarves are selling out quickly, as are exclusive, expensive tumbler dolls made of sable fur by an Evenki manufacturer.

Cai Guiru, first chairperson of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Russia, told the *Global Times* that while Chinese products have significantly improved in quality, Chinese companies are demonstrating stronger innovation capabilities, which is increasingly attracting Russian merchants, who show keen interest in China's AI devices, smart products, and automotive exhibition exhibits.

Also one day ahead of the visit, the inaugural award ceremony for “Outstanding Diplomat Medal” was held in Beijing

yesterday. Former Russian Ambassador to China Andrey Denisov was among the eight foreign diplomats to receive the medal in recognition of their outstanding contributions to advancing friendship and cooperation between China and their respective countries, CCTV reported.

“They are our good friends who have a deep knowledge of China, builders of bilateral relations, pioneers in understanding China, pacesetters in fostering people-to-people bonds and contributors to mutual benefit. The Chinese Foreign Ministry has established the Outstanding Diplomat Medal specifically to show our appreciation and gratitude to their dedicated efforts,” Guo said during yesterday's press conference.

With both sides having shown willingness to deepen future cooperation, the two countries have acknowledged their high-level political mutual trust and robust economic complementarity, and the present moment is ideal for translating such complementarities into tangible cooperation projects, Li said. “The upcoming visit is also expected to deliver substantial progress in practical cooperation,” Li continued.

Li said that as the world shifts to multipolarity amid growing uncertainties, China-Russia relations remain stable, and serve as a key stabilizer in a turbulent world. Against the prevailing global landscape, such engagements highlight China's crucial stabilizing function within the international system.

The areas of strategic coordination have been expanded amid the shifts in the external environment, Wang said. The visit and further coordination of the two countries will contribute to refining the global governance system, championing genuine multilateralism, enhancing multilateral cooperation frameworks, and galvanizing collective momentum of the Global South, and bolstering global peace, security and strategic stability through deeper consultations.

– Courtesy of Global Times

Li Qiang stresses promoting deep integration of AI, advanced manufacturing

BEIJING – Premier Li Qiang yesterday emphasized efforts to promote deep integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and advanced manufacturing.

Li, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks during an inspection tour in Beijing.

While visiting sci-tech enterprises, Li was briefed on technological innovation and industrial development of intelligent robots. He also inspected the application of the enterprises' research and development (R&D) achievements and products in different scenarios.

Intelligent robots are a key vehicle for the deep integration of AI and advanced manufacturing, Li noted.

Li called for sustained efforts to strengthen basic research, achieve breakthroughs in core technologies in key fields, and pursue cutting-edge exploration

for intelligent robots.

He also urged accelerated innovation in complete machines, key components, and intelligent decision-making and control systems to provide strong support for the high-quality development of the industry.

The intelligent robotics industry enjoys broad development space, and the country should leverage its advantages such as a supersized market, complete industrial chains, and rich application scenarios, and make good use of relevant supporting policies, Li said.

Li stressed that enterprises are the main force driving industrial transformation.

Efforts should be made to support more enterprises in advancing the intelligent upgrade of the entire process including R&D and design, manufacturing, operations management, and after-sales services, so as to better meet the needs of the people, said Li.

– Xinhua



Premier Li Qiang (center), also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, visits a sci-tech enterprise during an inspection tour in Beijing yesterday. – Xinhua

Lai Ching-te authorities primary source of instability across Taiwan Strait: FM spokesperson

BEIJING – The Lai Ching-te authorities, who are attempting to internationalize the Taiwan question, are the biggest destroyer of the status quo and the primary source of instability across the Taiwan Strait, foreign ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said yesterday.

Spokesperson Guo Jiakun made the remarks at a regular news briefing when responding to a query about relevant statements recently made by Lai Ching-te on social media.

“There is but one China in the

world. Taiwan is never a country, not in the past, and never in the future. The Chinese mainland and Taiwan belong to one and the same China. This constitutes the real status quo in the Taiwan Strait,” Guo said.

“‘Taiwan independence’ and cross-Strait peace and stability are as irreconcilable as fire and water. To uphold the one-China principle, one must oppose ‘Taiwan independence’. Any attempts to seek independence with external forces’ backing or by force are delusional,” added Guo. – Xinhua

China’s position on Taiwan region’s participation in activities of int’l organizations consistent, clear: FM spokesperson

BEIJING – China’s position on the Taiwan region’s participation in the activities of international organizations, including the World Health Organization (WHO), is consistent and clear, a foreign ministry spokesperson said in Beijing yesterday.

The spokesperson made the remarks in response to decisions by the General Committee and the Plenary Session of the 79th World Health Assembly (WHA) yesterday, respectively, to reject the so-called proposal of “inviting Taiwan to participate in the WHA as an observer” submitted by certain countries.

This has been the 10th year in a row that the WHA has rejected the so-called proposal concerning Taiwan, the spokesperson said.

As for the Taiwan region’s participation in the activities of international organizations, the spokesperson said that it must be handled in line with the one-China principle, which is also a fundamental principle as demonstrated by the UNGA Resolution 2758 and WHA Resolution 25.1. China’s Taiwan region, unless given approval by the central government, has no basis, reason or right to participate in the WHA.

Due to the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) authorities’ persistent separatist stance, the political foundation for the Taiwan region to participate in the WHA no longer exists, said the spokesperson.

The spokesperson noted that the Chinese central government attaches great importance to the health and well-being of compatriots in Taiwan. Under the prerequisite that the one-China principle is upheld, the Chinese central government has made proper arrangement for the Taiwan region’s participation in global health affairs, and the Taiwan region’s medical and health experts

can participate in WHO technical meetings.

Over the past year alone, the central government has approved the applications of 18 medical and health experts from the Taiwan region to participate in WHO technical activities, covering various topics including immunization strategy, vaccine development, mental health and digital health, the spokesperson added.

Under the framework of the International Health Regulations, the Taiwan region has unimpeded and full-fledged information exchange mechanisms with the WHO and countries in the world, and it can promptly access and report to the WHO concerning information related to health emergencies, said the spokesperson.

The spokesperson said that the two sides across the Taiwan Strait also have unimpeded information-sharing mechanism for infectious disease outbreaks and have held events such as the Hospital CEO Forum. These efforts fully demonstrate that the Chinese central government has every sincerity to address the health issues that compatriots in Taiwan care about, that the Taiwan region has sufficient and unimpeded channels to participate in the WHO’s communication and cooperation in the technical domain, and that the rights of the people in Taiwan regarding health are duly protected.

Compared with a handful of countries’ political manipulation that trumpets Taiwan’s participation in the WHA, the central government’s proper arrangement and concrete actions demonstrate real meaning for the livelihoods and well-being of compatriots in Taiwan, said the spokesperson, pointing out that the so-called “gap” in global anti-epidemic efforts is nothing but a politically-driven lie.

The spokesperson said that the DPP authorities and certain countries have been blatantly turning back the wheel of history by deliberately distorting and challenging UNGA Resolution 2758 to challenge the one-China principle. They are essentially trying to challenge not only China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, but also international justice and prevailing consensus.

China’s decision of not approving the Taiwan region’s participation in this year’s WHA has wide support and understanding from the international community, the spokesperson said, noting that the overwhelming majority of countries in the international community have reaffirmed to the Chinese side that they uphold UNGA Resolution 2758, firmly support the one-China principle, and oppose Taiwan’s participation in the WHA.

They also expressed their support for China’s position through various means, such as writing to the WHO Director-General, said the spokesperson.

“It shows that commitment to the one-China principle is where global opinion trends and the arc of history bends, and what the greater national interests entail,” the spokesperson said, noting that the international community’s commitment to the one-China principle is not to be challenged or shaken.

The spokesperson said that no matter what the DPP authorities say or do, it does not change the fact that the two sides of the Strait belong to one and the same China and Taiwan is part of China, nor can it stop the trend toward China’s ultimate and inevitable reunification.

“Taiwan independence” leads nowhere and provocations for that are doomed to failure, the spokesperson added. – Xinhua

China hails Seychelles’ move to bar Lai Ching-te’s outbound flight: Wang Yi

BEIJING – China highly appreciates Seychelles, together with governments of many friendly countries, for lawfully and openly revoking the outbound flight permits for Lai Ching-te, a representative figure of the “Taiwan independence” separatist forces, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, made the remarks while holding talks with Barry Faure, minister of foreign affairs and diaspora of Seychelles, in Beijing.

It is believed that more and more countries will, like Seychelles, stand

on the right side of international justice and history, Wang said.

Noting this year marks the 50th anniversary of China-Seychelles diplomatic ties, Wang said China is ready to jointly promote bilateral cooperation in digital economy, the marine economy, island economy, green economy and other fields to push the bilateral ties to a higher level.

Wang said China is willing to take the full implementation of its zero-tariff treatment to all 53 African nations with which it has diplomatic relations as an opportunity to provide more development opportunities for African countries.

He noted that China will continue to firmly support Seychelles in safeguarding its national sovereignty, independence and legitimate rights and interests.

Faure stressed that Seychelles reaffirmed its commitment to the one-China policy, which will remain unwavering in the future.

Seychelles supports the four global initiatives proposed by China and is willing to take the 50th anniversary of bilateral ties as an opportunity to maintain close high-level exchanges with China, deepen practical cooperation and enhance people-to-people exchanges, Faure said. – Xinhua

Japan arrests Americans over stunt at baby monkey Punch's zoo

TOKYO – Two American nationals were arrested in Japan after a stunt in which one entered the monkey enclosure at a zoo where a baby macaque named Punch became a global internet sensation this year, police said yesterday.

One of the men, who identified himself as a 24-year-old college student, was arrested Sunday after climbing over a fence and dropping into a dry moat surrounding the monkey exhibit at Ichikawa City Zoo outside Tokyo.

The other man, who was filming the act, identified himself as a 27-year-old singer.

Images on social media showed a person scaling the fence in a costume that included a smiley face head with sunglasses, prompting the monkeys to scatter.

The men did not come close to the animals, and were quickly apprehended by zoo officials, said an official at Ichikawa Police who spoke with AFP on a traditional condition of anonymity.

The two men face charges of forcible obstruction of business, which they refute, the police official said.

The duo did not have formal identifications with them and initially tried to lie to police about their names, he added.

The arrests follow a massive surge in domestic and international visitors to the zoo, driven by Punch's viral fame.

The baby monkey became an internet star this year after the zoo posted photos of Punch clutching an IKEA plush orangutan for comfort after being rejected by

his mother.

Punch was raised in an artificial environment after being born in July, and began training to rejoin his troop earlier this year.

Punch's predicament sparked huge interest online, spawning a devoted fanbase under the hashtag #HangInTherePunch.

An unprecedented number of tourists are flocking to Japan, but some residents have become fed up with unruly behaviour.

Last year, a Ukrainian YouTuber with more than 6.5 million subscribers was arrested after livestreaming himself trespassing in a house in the Fukushima nuclear exclusion zone.

And a US livestreamer known as Johnny Somali was arrested in 2023 for allegedly trespassing onto a construction site. –AFP

Philippines swears in senators for VP Duterte's impeachment trial



Protesters hold placards during a demonstration to call for the start of the impeachment trial against Philippine Vice-President Sara Duterte and the arrest of Philippine Senator Ronald "Bato" Dela Rosa outside the Senate of the Philippines in Pasay, Metro Manila yesterday. –AFP

MANILA – Philippine lawmakers were yesterday sworn in to serve as judges in the trial of impeached Vice President Sara Duterte, the second attempt since last year to force her from office.

Sixteen votes in the 24-seat Senate would be needed to convict the daughter of ex-president Rodrigo Duterte, an outcome that seems unlikely as the chamber is packed with her allies.

The Senate court has yet to set the trial dates, but ordered the charges be provided to Vice President Duterte.

The 47-year-old was impeached or formally accused by a large majority of the House of Representatives last week 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 on any of the charges would see her removed and banned from elected office for life.

The vice president has declared her candidacy for president in the 2028 election.

The 23 senators present donned maroon velvet robes yesterday and swore to "do impartial justice according to the constitution and the laws of the Philippines" at the trial.

Ronald Dela Rosa was the only senator not present as he evades an International Criminal Court arrest warrant accusing him of crimes against humanity for his role in ex-president Duterte's deadly drug crackdown.

Duterte ally and Senate President Alan Peter Cayetano, the chief judge, ordered the written charge sheet delivered to the defendant, requiring her to submit her reply within 10 calendar days.

"She is directed to appear before the session hall of the Senate of the Philippines upon notice," Cayetano added.

Duterte swept to victory as the running mate of Ferdinand Marcos in 2022, but the alliance was broken last year when Marcos had her father arrested and turned over to the ICC where he now awaits trial over his deadly drug war. –AFP



People visit the Aceh Tsunami Museum on International Museum Day in Banda Aceh, Indonesia yesterday. –AFP

Train driver charged over deadly Bangkok bus collision used drugs: official

BANGKOK – The driver of a train that collided with a bus in Thailand's capital, killing eight people, has tested positive for drugs and was charged with reckless driving, officials said yesterday.

The freight train crashed into the public bus on Saturday afternoon at a busy junction in Bangkok, with the vehicle bursting into flames and 30 people left injured, authorities said.

Police charged the train driver, who was also injured, and a railway-crossing guard on Sunday with negligence causing injury and death, said Urumporn Koondejsumrit, chief of the local police station where the crash occurred.

Both denied the charge, he told AFP.

"The train driver was found with methamphetamine and marijuana substances in his urine," Anan Phonimdaeng, acting director of the State Railway of Thailand, later told a press conference.

The driver was suspended from duty, he added.

Images on social media on Saturday showed the train approaching a level crossing at a moderate speed before colliding with the bus, which was on the tracks and stuck in traffic.

AFP journalists saw other damaged vehicles and a burned-out SUV near the crash site.

The government will pay families 2.39 million baht (US\$73,000) in compensation per deceased victim, Deputy Transport Minister Siripong Angkasakulkiat told reporters yesterday.

Those injured would receive between US\$4,000 and US\$30,600, Siripong said.

The government was considering a plan to restrict where and when trains were allowed to travel through central Bangkok, senior transport ministry official Jiraroht Sukolrat said.

Transport Minister Phiphat Ratchakitprakarn said freight trains normally travel through the

capital at night, but the train that collided with the bus was delayed.

Bangkok police chief Siam Boonsom said Sunday that there was traffic congestion at the crossing daily, but never an accident.

Police were reviewing footage of the scene to determine whether the crossing guard was negligent, he told reporters.

"We see the official holding the red flag which means the track was not safe but we also see that the train did not stop or slow down, causing the crash," Siam said.

Footage of the crash site on other days showed vehicles stopped on the track, with officials raising the red flag to signal to oncoming trains to stop until the traffic cleared, he said.

Authorities were also investigating the speed of the train and its braking distance, Siam added.

Local emergency services said eight people were killed and 30 injured, with 15 still in hospitals as of yesterday afternoon. –AFP

Malaysia ends Indonesian migrant boat search, 16 bodies recovered

KUALA LUMPUR – Malaysia said yesterday it had ended a search for passengers of a migrant boat from Indonesia that sank off the country's western coast last week after the bodies of all 16 missing were recovered.

The Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) in Perak state said 23 people were rescued after the vessel sank off Pangkor island west of peninsular Malaysia on May 11.

Perak MMEA director Mohamad Shukri Khotob told AFP that the search was called off Saturday.

"It's the standard (procedure) for us to carry out search and rescue mission for six days. We ended the search at 7 p.m. [local time] on Saturday after there were no new discoveries in the area," Mohamad Shukri said by telephone yesterday.

He said all 23 survivors were Indonesian but he was unsure if the 16 dead were all their compatriots.

The migrants were trying to reach several destinations in Malaysia, including Penang, Terengganu, Selangor and Kuala Lumpur for work.

Mohamad Shukri said initial information from survivors that there were 37 people on board was inaccurate, as those rescued and the body count totalled 39.

Aside from the MMEA, the search mission also involved the Royal Malaysian Navy, the Marine Police Force and local fisherfolk.

Relatively affluent Malaysia is home to millions of migrants from poorer parts of Asia, many of them undocumented, working in industries including construction and agriculture.

But the crossings, facilitated by human trafficking syndicates, are often hazardous leading to boats capsizing.

In one of the deadliest recent incidents, 36 migrants died in November 2025 after their boat capsized near the Thai-Malaysian coast. –AFP

Encroaching world threatens India's last 'uncontacted' tribe

Bhuvan Bagga

INDIA – One of the last outsiders to make authorised visits to India's only "uncontacted" tribe says it may be time to reconnect with the isolated people – in order to shield them from an encroaching world.

Anthropologist Anstice Justin, 71, took part in the government's limited contact missions to the restricted North Sentinel island in the Andaman Sea between 1986 and 2004.

The island's inhabitants are famously resistant to engaging with outsiders, and even killed a US missionary who made an illegal visit in 2018.

What little is known about the Sentinelese – who live on the 10-kilometre wide island, covered in rainforest and ringed by coral reefs – comes from the government missions.

But even those trips resulted in extremely limited understanding of the people. "We don't even know how they identify themselves," Justin told AFP on the main Andaman Island – a different world, but just two hours away by boat.

Justin, himself from another group in the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago, recounted his first trip in 1986 to North Sentinel.

'Eyes on, hands off'

He waded through lagoon

waters with saltwater crocodiles, landing on a white sand beach, carrying a sack of coconuts as a sign of goodwill.

"We saw smoke curling, emitting from the forest," said Justin, a former deputy director of the government's Anthropological Survey of India.

"After a few minutes, we saw the Sentinelese emerging from the forest," he added.

The islanders, who government estimates put at 50 people and are designated a "Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group", made headlines in 2018 when they used bows and arrows to shoot dead an American missionary, John Allen Chau.

Chau broke the government "tribal reserve" exclusion limit stretching five kilometres out to sea, dodging coastguards and marine police.

But Justin, who visited the islands more than 30 times, said his experience was very different.

"What we observed was that there was no sign of unfriendliness, of, allow me to use a term, ferociousness," Justin said.

Observations show the people use narrow outrigger canoes, live in large communal huts, carry spears, bows and arrows, and wear fibre waistbelts, as well as necklaces and headbands.

Justin said that the government's



This photograph taken on March 26 shows a board marking a tribal reserve area on the outskirts of Campbell Bay at Great Nicobar island. – AFP

protection policy was well-intentioned – but that the modern world was not allowing the Sentinelese to be left on their own.

"The present policy that the Andaman and Nicobar administration has adopted is 'eyes on, hands off' – that means distant observation," Justin said, speaking in the archipelago's capital Sri Vijayapuram – formerly known as Port Blair, a city of more than 100,000 people.

Outside contact with other islanders had a "devastating impact" in the past with diseases brought in, according to rights group Survival International, noting populations of the Great Andamanese peoples collapsed by as much as 99 percent.

"The Sentinelese have made it clear that they do not want contact," Survival International argues.

'Fool's paradise'

Andaman police chief HGS Dhaliwal said his officers were doing everything possible to protect the island from outsiders, but Justin warned that social media-driven publicity seekers were increasingly difficult to deter.

"It is sometimes a challenge to be able to prevent any kind of incident in totality," Dhaliwal added.

"We do have surprise patrols, but still there have been a couple of incidents where poachers came within five kilometres of the island,

and there have been other detections and detentions."

Police in February arrested two fishermen who entered the waters around the island, and last year arrested US citizen Mykhailo Viktorovych Polyakov, who landed for five minutes carrying a can of Diet Coke and a coconut in a bid to become a YouTube star.

"We would be living in a fool's paradise if we assume they are living in their own insulated world," Justin added.

"The self-contained community survived for several thousand years, but with some kind of peaceful situation – unlike the present day's disturbing situation, where everyone is keen to 'glorify' themselves by seeing the Sentinelese."

Fame-seeker Polyakov, who was arrested in March 2025, pleaded guilty to breaking the protected zone, and was allowed to return to the United States after serving a 25-day jail term and paying a 15,000 rupee (US\$161) fine.

Justin said that highly-regulated meetings may help the Sentinelese by giving them warnings.

"In the long run, self-contained people may not be able to survive in this competitive world," he said. "We'd at least be able to tell them, 'There are other people who are trying to disturb you'." – AFP



Afghanistan's Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock along with World Health Organisation (WHO) workers spray disinfectant to prevent Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever also known as Congo fever, at a cowshed in the Zor village of Kandahar yesterday. – AFP

Thailand tightens durian standards to boost global competitiveness

BANGKOK – Thailand's Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives is stepping up efforts to elevate domestic durian quality standards, in a bid to shore up global consumer trust and consolidate the country's status as the world's leading durian exporter, Deputy Government Spokesperson Patdarasm Thongsaluaykorn said yesterday.

The ministry has instructed all relevant agencies to fully enforce the "Four No's" regulation, which bans sales of unripe durians, pest-affected produce, products with fraudulent origin certificates, and fruit containing chemical residues, Patdarasm said.

Authorities have joined hands with agricultural bodies and private

enterprises to audit quality across the supply chain, she said, noting that key measures include verifying fruit maturity before harvest, controlling localized pests, implementing farm-to-table traceability, and conducting random chemical-residue tests before shipment.

Furthermore, round-the-clock logistics and export support services have been launched to cut operational expenses and accelerate cargo delivery, enabling smooth circulation amid this year's peak harvest period, she added.

The government projects that such rigorous quality assurance mechanisms will push the nation's durian export revenue above 150 billion baht (about US\$ 4.57 billion) in 2026. – Xinhua

5 teens drown while swimming in Vietnam river

HANOI – Five teenage students drowned in northern Vietnam yesterday after one was caught in a powerful river current and four friends jumped in to attempt a rescue, state media reported.

The accident happened after school hours in Phu Tho province when the

students, aged 13 and 14, went swimming after studying for an examination, the VNExpress news site said.

Authorities had recovered all five bodies from the Lo river by early evening, it said.

Four primary and lower middle school students drowned in a separate

incident on the Banh Lai river in Dak Lak province on Saturday.

They were also reportedly swept away while swimming.

According to Vietnam's health ministry, roughly 2,000 children between the ages of 5 and 15 drown in the country every year. – AFP

Gunmen in Pakistan kill police officers guarding polio workers

PESHAWAR – Gunmen in northwest Pakistan killed two police officers protecting polio vaccination workers yesterday, a security official said, on the first day of a nationwide campaign to counter rising cases.

Pakistan is one of two countries, along with Afghanistan, where polio remains endemic, but militants have killed hundreds of police officers and health workers over the past decade as part of a campaign against the Pakistani state.

"During the polio campaign in

the tribal district of Bajaur District, two police officials assigned to protect vaccination teams were shot dead by motorcycle-riding militants in two separate attacks," a senior security official based in Peshawar told AFP.

The official added that "terrorists gunned down two more policemen" performing routine duties in Kohat and Dera Ismail Khan.

The attacks come as Pakistan kicked off a week-long polio vaccination campaign in 79

high-risk districts in which more than 19 million children will be administered polio drops.

Polio, a highly infectious virus mainly affecting children under five, can result in lifelong paralysis but is easily prevented by the oral administration of a few drops of a vaccine.

There is a raft of misinformation circulating about the vaccine in rural Pakistan, including that it is a CIA plot to stop Muslims from having children. – AFP

Sri Lanka plans new marine protected areas in northern waters

COLOMBO – Sri Lanka is planning to declare new marine protected areas in its northern waters to curb illegal fishing, protect marine biodiversity and support sustainable livelihoods, the Ministry of Environment said yesterday.

The ministry said the proposal was discussed at a meeting chaired by Deputy Minister of Environment Anton Jayakody and Deputy Minister of Defence Aruna Jayasekara.

Officials discussed threats from illegal, unreported and unregulated

fishing, including dynamite fishing, unauthorized spear-fishing and the use of banned fishing gear.

The ministry said suitable islands and surrounding marine zones in the Northern Province have been identified for possible declaration as protected areas. – Xinhua

Iran says responded to latest US peace proposal

TEHRAN – Iran said yesterday it had responded to a new US proposal aimed at ending the war, adding that diplomatic exchanges continue despite Iranian media reports describing Washington's demands as excessive.

Washington and Tehran have been swapping proposals in an effort to end the conflict which the US and Israel launched on February 28, but they have held only a single round of talks despite a fragile ceasefire.

"As we announced yesterday, our concerns were conveyed to the American side," foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei told a news briefing, adding that exchanges were "continuing through the Pakistani mediator".

Baqaei defended Iran's demands, including the release of Iranian assets frozen abroad and the lifting of long-standing sanctions.

"The points raised are Iranian demands that have been firmly defended by the Iranian negotiating team in every round of negotiations," he said.

He also defended an Iranian stipulation that the US pay war reparations, describing the conflict as "illegal and baseless".

On the possibility of another military confrontation, Baqaei said Iran was "fully prepared for any eventuality".



An Iranian woman yesterday walks past a huge billboard supporting Iran's national football team in the upcoming 2026 World Cup, installed on a building in Enghelab Square in Tehran. Iran's national football team was headed to Turkey yesterday to play a final friendly match and apply for visas to fly to the United States for the 2026 World Cup, Iranian media reported. (More details on p.13) – AFP

On Sunday, Iran's Fars news agency said Washington had presented a five-point list, which included a demand for Iran to keep only one nuclear site in operation and transfer its stockpile of highly enriched uranium to the United States.

The US had refused to release "even 25 percent" of Iran's frozen assets or pay any reparations for war damage, Fars said.

The report said the US had also made clear it would only cease hostilities when Tehran engages in formal peace negotiations.

Iran's Mehr news agency said

"the United States, offering no tangible concessions, wants to obtain concessions that it failed to obtain during the war, which will lead to an impasse in the negotiations".

New Hormuz body

In an earlier proposal, which was sent last week, Iran had called for an end to the war on all fronts, including Israel's campaign in Lebanon, as well as a halt to a US naval blockade on Iranian ports in place since April 13.

It also called for the lifting of all US sanctions on Iran and the release of its assets frozen abroad.

Yesterday, Iran's Tasnim news agency, citing an unnamed source close to the Iranian negotiating team, said "contrary to previous texts, the Americans agreed in a new text to waive oil sanctions during the negotiation period."

Fars said that the Iranian proposal had emphasised that Tehran would continue to manage the strategic Strait of Hormuz, a vital energy conduit which Iran has largely kept closed since the start of the war.

Yesterday, Iran's Supreme National Security Council announced the formation of a new body to manage the strait.

On its official X account, the Supreme National Security Council shared a post from the Persian Gulf Strait Authority (PGSA) saying it would provide "real-time updates" on operations and developments in the strait.

The PGSA account later said in a post that it was "the legal and official representative authority of the Islamic Republic of Iran responsible for managing transit through the Strait of Hormuz".

It added that "navigation within the designated jurisdictional area of the Strait of Hormuz" required "full coordination" with the authority and that passage without authorisation would be considered illegal.

Earlier this month Iranian

English-speaking broadcaster Press TV said it constituted a "system to exercise sovereignty over the Strait of Hormuz" and that ships passing through the strait were to be sent instructions by email.

Cable threat

Iran's Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) also said yesterday that internet fibre optic cables passing through the Strait could be brought under a system of permits.

"Following the imposition of control over the Strait of Hormuz, Iran, citing its absolute sovereignty over the bed and subsoil of its territorial sea... could declare that all fibre-optic cables passing through the waterway are subject to permits," the ideological arm of Iran's military said in a social media post.

Separately yesterday, the IRGC said their forces had struck groups linked to the United States and Israel in the western Iranian province of Kurdistan, near the border with Iraq.

In a statement carried by the ISNA news agency, the IRGC said groups from "northern Iraq and acting on behalf of the US and the Zionist regime were attempting to smuggle a large shipment of American weapons and ammunition" into Iran.

They said the groups were hit in the Iranian city of Baneh in the Kurdistan region. – AFP

Lebanese president says he will 'do the impossible' to stop war with Israel

BEIRUT – Lebanese President Joseph Aoun said yesterday he was ready to "do the impossible" to stop the war with Israel, as the health ministry said Israeli strikes have killed more than 3,000 people.

Aoun's comments came as the Israeli army carried out another series of strikes in south Lebanon, while Hezbollah said it had struck a military target in northern Israel.

Since the start of the ceasefire on April 17, Israel has continued to launch strikes, carry out demolitions and issue evacuation orders in south Lebanon, saying it is targeting the Iran-backed armed group.

Israel yesterday issued fresh evacuation warnings to three southern villages, and later repeated its warning to one on the outskirts of the coastal city of Tyre.

Hezbollah has also continued operations against Israeli forces in south Lebanon and northern Israel, including what it said was a drone attack yesterday on "the vehicle of the commander of the 300th Brigade of the Israeli enemy army".

Yesterday, the Lebanese health ministry said the death toll from Israeli strikes since the start of the war on March 2 had reached 3,020, with 211 people 18 and under and 116 healthcare workers among those killed.

"The framework that Lebanon has set for the negotiations consists of an Israeli withdrawal, a ceasefire, the deployment of the army along the border, the return of the displaced, and economic aid," Aoun said in a statement yesterday.

"My duty, based on my position and my responsibility, is to do the impossible, and to choose what is least costly, in order to stop the war against Lebanon and its people," he added.



Soldiers take formation during the funeral of Israeli army Captain Maoz Israel Recanati, who was killed in combat in Lebanon, in Jerusalem on Sunday. Israel's military said on Saturday that Recanati died in combat in southern Lebanon, without providing additional information, bringing its losses to 21 personnel since the war with Hezbollah began in early March. Since the war began, 20 Israeli soldiers and one civilian contractor have been killed. – AFP

Last week the truce was extended for 45 days following a third round of talks between Lebanese and Israeli representatives in Washington, discussions to which Hezbollah is opposed.

But the ceasefire has failed to stop the violence, with Hezbollah yesterday saying it had fired a drone at a military target in northern Israel.

Ongoing demolitions

The target was "an Iron Dome platform belonging to the Israeli enemy army" based in a military encampment in northern Israel, Hezbollah said, referring to Israel's air defence system.

The attack was a response to Israeli violations of the ceasefire, it added.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency (NNA) reported a series of Israeli strikes across the south.

The Israeli military also issued an evacuation warning for three southern

Lebanese towns.

The attacks came a day after Israeli strikes killed seven people in Lebanon, including a member of the group Palestinian Islamic Jihad in the country's northeast, far from the Israel-Lebanon border.

Israeli soldiers have invaded and occupied part of south Lebanon, operating inside an Israeli-declared "yellow line" that runs around 10 kilometres north of the border. They have carried out large-scale demolitions in the area.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday his country was facing the challenge of neutralising first-person view drones, as Hezbollah has increasingly made use of the tech to strike Israeli forces.

Israeli attacks have killed more than 2,900 people in Lebanon since the start of the war, including more than 400 since the ceasefire took effect on April 17, according to Lebanese authorities. – AFP

US designs on Greenland unchanged, PM says after meeting Trump envoy

NUUK, Denmark – The United States' stance towards Greenland has not altered, the premier for the Danish autonomous territory said yesterday after a first meeting with President Donald Trump's envoy to the island.

Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen called the meeting with envoy Jeff Landry "constructive" – but noted there was "no sign... that anything has changed" with the US position.

"It was a constructive meeting, where we were able to engage in dialogue in a positive spirit and with great mutual respect," the Greenland premier told a media conference.

"We clearly reiterated that the people of Greenland are not for sale and that Greenlanders have the right to self-determination. This is not a subject for negotiation," Nielsen stressed.

Landry's visit comes as transatlantic tensions over Trump's repeated claims to the territory have receded somewhat but not gone away.

Greenland's foreign minister, Mute Egede, also told reporters after the meeting that the US has not given up on its aims to acquire the territory.

"We have our red line. The Americans' starting point has not changed either," Egede said.

In January, Trump backed down from repeated threats to seize Greenland, possibly through military force, after Denmark and other NATO allies displayed fierce resistance.

Afterwards, officials from Copenhagen and Nuuk held a first meeting in Washington and a working group was then established to discuss the US position.

Trump has repeatedly argued the US needs to control Greenland because of national security concerns, hypothesising that if America does not take over the Arctic island then it could fall into the hands of China or Russia.

Landry, who is the governor of Louisiana, arrived for his first visit in the role as US special envoy to Greenland on Sunday. He is due to take part in an economic forum in the Greenlandic capital on today and tomorrow. – AFP

WHO declares int'l emergency as Ebola outbreak kills more than 80 in DR Congo

KINSHASA – The World Health Organisation declared an international health emergency on Sunday over an outbreak of an Ebola strain in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) that has killed more than 80 and for which there is no vaccine.

Fears of further spread grew when a laboratory on Sunday confirmed a case in the major eastern DRC city of Goma, which is controlled by the Rwanda-backed M23 militia.

A total of 88 deaths and 336 suspected cases of the highly contagious haemorrhagic fever have so far been reported, the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC Africa) said in an update on Saturday.

“A positive case in Goma has been confirmed by tests carried out by the laboratory. It involves the wife of a man who died of Ebola in Bunia, who travelled to Goma after her husband’s death whilst already infected,” Prof. Jean-Jacques Muyembe, director of the Congolese National Institute for Biomedical Research (INRB), told AFP.

WHO director general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus expressed deep disquiet as the reported cases rise.

“I determine that the epidemic constitutes a public health emergency of international concern,” Ghebreyesus posted to X, albeit adding that as yet it “does not meet the criteria of pandemic emergency”.

As things stand, the Geneva-based WHO has declared its second-highest level of alert – a pandemic being the highest – with the global health body warning the scale of the current outbreak remains unclear.

“There are significant uncertainties to the true number of infected persons and geographic spread,” the WHO said.

Medical aid group Doctors Without



A border health official at the Busunga crossing between Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) checks a traveller's temperature using a contactless infrared thermometer in Bundibugyo, yesterday. Ugandan officials confirmed yesterday that a 59-year-old man from the DRC died in Kampala, the capital and largest city of Uganda, after being admitted earlier in the week. Tests showed the victim was infected with the Bundibugyo strain of Ebola, first identified in 2007. – AFP

Borders (MSF) said it was preparing a “large-scale response”, calling the rapid spread of the outbreak “extremely concerning”.

DR Congo’s Health Minister Samuel-Roger Kamba said the Bundibugyo strain causing the outbreak had “a very high fatality rate, which can reach 50 percent”.

Patient zero

The strain – first identified in 2007 – has also killed a Congolese national in neighbouring Uganda, officials said on Saturday.

Uganda on Sunday announced the postponement of the Martyrs’ Day pilgrimage,

an annual Christian festival that normally draws thousands of worshippers from across the border in eastern Congo.

Vaccines are only available for the Zaire strain, which was identified in 1976 and has a higher fatality rate of 60-90 percent.

Health officials had confirmed the latest outbreak on Friday in Ituri province in northeastern DRC, bordering Uganda and South Sudan, according to CDC Africa.

According to Kamba, patient zero was a nurse who reported to a health facility in Ituri’s provincial capital Bunia on April 24, with symptoms suggesting Ebola.

Symptoms of the disease include fever,

haemorrhaging and vomiting.

Large-scale transport of medical equipment is a challenge in the DRC, a country of more than 100 million inhabitants which is four times the size of France but has poor communications infrastructure.

High risk of spread

It is the 17th Ebola outbreak to hit the DRC, and officials warned of a high risk of spread.

With the outbreak largely concentrated in difficult to access areas few samples have been lab tested.

But the WHO said the high positivity rate of initial samples, the confirmation of cases in two countries, and the increasing reports of suspected cases “all point towards a potentially much larger outbreak than what is currently being detected and reported, with significant local and regional risk of spread”.

The previous outbreak of Ebola was last August in the region, with at least 34 people dying before it was declared eradicated in December.

The disease, over the past 50 years, has killed around 15,000 people in Africa, despite advances in vaccines and treatment.

Nearly 2,300 people died in the deadliest outbreak in the DRC between 2018 and 2020.

Ebola, believed to have originated in bats, can cause severe bleeding and organ failure.

Outbreaks over the past half century have seen a mortality rate among those affected of between 25 percent and 90 percent, according to WHO

The virus spreads from person to person through bodily fluids or exposure to the blood of an infected persons, who become contagious only once they display symptoms. The incubation period can last up to 21 days.

– AFP

Moldovan broadcaster head quits over Eurovision voting debacle

CHISINAU, Moldova – The head of Moldova’s public broadcaster announced his resignation yesterday after the country’s jury threw its support mainly behind Israel and Poland in the weekend’s Eurovision competition.

The final of the 70th Eurovision Song Contest – hit by an unprecedented boycott over Israel’s participation – took place in Vienna on Saturday, with juries and the public in each of the 35 participating countries giving points to whoever they thought should win.

Moldova’s jury gave the highest points to Poland with 12 points, followed with 10 for Israel, and gave only three points to Romania and zero to Ukraine, sparking a storm of criticism by Romanians and Moldovans on social networks.

Teleradio Moldova director Vlad Turcanu announced his resignation, citing the “extraordinary” and “serious” event of the jury failing to take into account “sensitivities” between Moldova and its neighbours Romania and Ukraine.

“Our stance toward Ukraine is not one of zero points, and our feelings toward Romania can only be ones of love,” he said, adding that while he did not give instructions to the jury on how to vote, he bears a responsibility for what happened.

Moldova’s public gave Romania the maximum 12 points.

Romania’s Alexandra Capitanescu and

her rock song “Choke Me” came third in the contest, with the overwhelming help of the public vote.

Bulgarian singer Dara with “Bangaran” won the world’s biggest televised music event, followed by Israel in second place.

Capitanescu, 22, said she had no hard feelings, thanking Moldovans who voted for her.

“We aren’t upset with the Moldovan jury, which scored the entries as it saw fit, and it’s not right for an entire nation to be held accountable for the decision of just seven people,” Capitanescu wrote on Instagram.

Moldova’s culture minister Cristian Jordan on the weekend called for “explanations” for the jury’s choice.

Jury member Viktoria Cusnir said she regretted having accepted the invitation to be in the jury, evoking “a public lynching experience” over the vote, which she didn’t consider “an expression of anti-Romanian sentiment”.

“The issue of the neighbourhood vote should be discussed from the outset, if it is the most important criterion imposed on the jury,” she wrote on Facebook yesterday.

Moldovan Eurovision contestant Satoshi, who placed eighth, also made “an appeal to reason” on Instagram on Sunday. “Do not fuel hatred. Our countries have been and will remain friends,” he wrote.

– Xinhua

46 children, adults kidnapped in southern Nigeria schools attack: Christian group

LAGOS – Forty-six people, most of them children, were kidnapped during a rare attack on three schools in southwest Nigeria last week, the Christian Association of Nigeria said yesterday.

Nigeria is battling a scourge of criminal gangs known as bandits who kidnap for ransom and target poorly policed rural areas.

But most attacks, including school kidnappings, have happened in the north and centre of the country, where the conflict with the gangs is most prominent.

Elisha Olukayode Ogundiya, the Christian association chairman in Oyo state, said that “46 persons, mostly children” aged from two to 16 were seized in the attacks in the southwestern state on Friday.

In what police on Friday called a “coordinated attack”, gunmen simultaneously raided Baptist Nursery and Primary in Yawota, and two other schools in Esiele, seizing pupils and teachers.

President Bola Tinubu yesterday condemned the attack as “barbaric”, while promising that the federal government was working with the Oyo state authorities to “rescue all the victims”.

“We expect a breakthrough soon,” he said in a statement released by his office but made no reference to a similar kidnapping that occurred last week in northeastern Borno state.

No group has claimed responsibility

for the Oyo state attack, but its governor, Seyi Makinde, said on Sunday that seven teachers were captured and one was killed by the “terrorists”, suspected to be fleeing intensified military operations in the country’s northwest.

“With the pressure on the terrorists and the bandits in the northwest, they will keep moving southward,” the governor said.

School kidnappings are rare in Oyo, one of Nigeria’s most populous states and whose capital Ibadan is a major educational hub.

Five forest guards were killed at a game reserve in the state in January, in an attack the police said was carried out by an “armed banditry syndicate”.

The latest abduction brings to nearly 90 the number of people missing from schools across the country after attacks last week.

Kidnapping for ransom has become almost a daily occurrence in the west African nation.

At least 42 children were taken from a school in the violence-battered Borno state last week, according to a local lawmaker.

At least 10 of the children kidnapped from Mussa village were aged between two and three years, according to a list shared by one of the community members.

Swaths of the rural countryside remain outside, or barely under, government control.

Nearly 300 students and teachers were snatched from a Catholic boarding school in northern Kaduna state late last year. – AFP

Spanish court orders US\$64 million tax refund to Shakira

Marie Giffard

MADRID – A Spanish court has ordered the tax authority to refund Colombian pop star Shakira more than 55 million euros (US\$64 million) improperly collected in a dispute over her 2011 taxes, according to a ruling seen yesterday.

The National Audience said tax authorities had failed to prove that the “Hips Don’t Lie” singer spent more than 183 days in Spain in 2011, the legal threshold requiring residents to pay personal income tax in the country.

“On the contrary, the court found that Shakira spent 163 days in Spain and that the tax authorities had therefore failed to prove that the singer had the centre of her economic interests in Spain,” according to the ruling issued last month which was seen by AFP yesterday.

The court ruled that Spain’s tax agency must return all amounts paid, plus legal interest, effectively cancelling multimillion-euro penalties and tax adjustments that had

classified Shakira as a Spanish tax resident for that year.

Shakira welcomed the ruling, saying the court had “finally set the record straight” after years of “brutal public exposure, orchestrated campaigns to destroy my reputation, and sleepless nights that ultimately affected my health and my family’s wellbeing”.

“Every step of the process was leaked, distorted, and amplified, using my name and public image to send a threatening message to other taxpayers. Today, that narrative falls apart,” she added in a statement sent to AFP.

The total repayment exceeds 55 million euros and includes about 24 million euros in income tax, nearly 25 million euros in fines for what authorities had described as a “very serious” infringement, plus interest.

Other cases

The ruling comes as Shakira, 49, is set to wrap up her record-breaking



Colombian singer Shakira performs during her “Las Mujeres Ya No Lloran” (“Women No Longer Cry”) world tour in Buenos Aires on March 7, 2025. – AFP

“Women Don’t Cry Anymore” world tour with a concert residency in Madrid starting in September.

Shakira lived with former FC Barcelona and Spain footballer Gerard Piqué for more than a decade before the couple separated in 2022.

The singer, whose full name is Shakira Isabel Mebarak Ripoll, moved to Miami with their two sons after the split.

Shakira reportedly met Piqué while filming the music video for “Waka Waka”, the official song of the 2010 World Cup, which featured several footballers.

She has maintained that she established her permanent residence in Barcelona at the end of 2014 and later transferred her tax residency from the Bahamas to Spain in 2015.

The dispute is one of several involving the artist and Spain’s tax agency, including a separate settlement in 2018 related to alleged irregularities in her filings.

‘Inquisition trial’

Spanish authorities also argued she lived in Spain more than 183 days per year between 2012 and 2014, accusing her of defrauding the tax office of 14.5 million euros earned during that period.

In 2023, Shakira reached a

separate settlement with prosecutors to settle the case and avoid trial.

As part of the deal, she accepted the charges in exchange for paying a fine of nearly 7.8 million euros.

Spain’s tax office went through her social media posts to gather evidence that she had been in Spain for over 183 days per year.

Its lawyers summoned dozens of witnesses, including her hairdresser and neighbours to back their case.

Shakira compared the tax office investigation into her affairs to an “Inquisition trial,” saying in a 2024 letter published in Spanish daily El Mundo that authorities were more focused on “burning her in public” than listening to her arguments.

Spain has in recent years cracked down on celebrities such as Argentine football star Lionel Messi and Portugal’s Cristiano Ronaldo, for unpaid taxes.

Both players were convicted of evasion and received prison sentences that were waived for first-time offenders. – AFP

Havana advises Cubans on how to survive ‘enemy attacks’

HAVANA – Cuba has posted a “family guide” on provincial websites on how to survive “potential enemy attacks,” as the communist-run island reels from US pressure and energy shortages.

The release of the document – which has not been reported by state media at the national level – comes days after the head of the CIA visited Cuba, an extraordinary step in contact between Washington and Havana.

US President Donald Trump has mused openly about toppling the communist government in Cuba.

Titled “Protect, Resist, Survive, and Win,” the guide advises on how to “protect life in the face of possible enemy attacks,” according to a statement on Friday on the Havana province website.

The radio station in Sancti Spiritus, a province in central Cuba, posted the information on its website on Saturday, offering the document for download.

The guide outlines recommendations ranging from preparing a “family emergency kit containing drinking water, food (...) medicine, and hygiene supplies” to paying attention to air raid warnings.

It urges people to learn first aid and reminds them to pay attention to information from civil defence authorities.

On Thursday, CIA Director John Ratcliffe made a highly unusual public visit to Havana and met with officials governing an island that endures constant power outages prompted by a fuel

blockade ordered by Trump.

One of Cuba’s last economic lifelines was cut in January when US forces toppled the leader of oil-rich Venezuela, then blocked all fuel deliveries to Cuba, asserting that the island 150 km off its coast poses a major threat to US national security.

The low-key release of the document comes as the island of 9.6 million inhabitants is rocked by an unprecedented socio-economic crisis, with many Cubans lacking access to basic necessities.

The government said last week the country has run out of diesel and fuel oil reserves, and lengthy, repeated power outages sparked rare protests in several neighborhoods of Havana in recent days. – AFP

Cape Verde opposition wins parliamentary elections: preliminary results



An official of Cape Verde’s National Electoral Commission (CNE) empties a ballot box ahead of ballot counting at the polling station in Mindelo on Sunday. – AFP

PRAIA – Cape Verde’s main opposition party has won parliamentary elections with 46 percent of the vote, according to provisional results published yesterday.

The national electoral commission said the African Party for the Independence of Cape Verde (PAICV) secured 33 of the 72 seats in the National Assembly in Sunday’s election.

The results are based on 98.1 percent of polling stations.

PAICV leader Francisco Carvalho has claimed victory and is set to become prime minister as leader of the largest party in parliament.

He will replace Ulisses Correia e Silva, who had headed the government for 10 years.

“Cape Verdeans received my party’s message well about a Cape Verde for all and that it was time to change course and build a new Cape Verde,” said Carvalho, who is also mayor of the capital, Praia.

The PAICV could win at least 37 seats and secure an outright majority in parliament, once all the results are counted.

Silva, who had been trying for a

third term in office, accepted that his centre-right Movement for Democracy (MpD) had lost and said he had called Carvalho to congratulate him.

“These results do not correspond to the goals the MpD had of winning the elections and continuing to govern the country,” he added.

Cape Verde, an archipelago of 550,000 inhabitants in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, lies some 600 kilometres off the coast of Senegal.

A Portuguese colony until 1975, it has been seen as a model of democracy in Africa.

Since the first free elections in 1991, the country has enjoyed relative calm with no electoral violence, despite two, five-year periods of political cohabitation between different parties heading the government and presidency.

The country, however, faces significant social challenges, including poverty and youth unemployment.

Presidential elections are due to be held in November. The incumbent, José Maria Neves, who is backed by the PAICV, is hoping for a second, five-year term. – AFP

Spanish king to go to Mexico for World Cup in new sign of thaw

MADRID – Spain’s King Felipe VI will go to Mexico next month to attend the 2026 World Cup, palace sources said yesterday, indicating the latest sign of a thaw between the two countries.

The king has accepted an invitation from Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum and FIFA head Gianni Infantino to attend Spain’s World Cup game against Uruguay on June 26, the sources told AFP.

Diplomatic relations have been strained since 2019, when Mexico demanded that the Spanish crown apologise for abuses committed during the conquest and colonisation of the Americas in the 16th century.

Sheinbaum excluded the king from her inauguration in October

2024 partly because Spain had not responded to the demand.

Tensions have eased since the king in March acknowledged that there had been “a lot of abuse” during the conquest of the Americas.

Felipe made the informal observations at an exhibition in the presence of Mexico’s ambassador to Spain.

Scheinbaum welcomed the comments, calling them “a gesture of rapprochement”.

The following month she attended a gathering of leftist leaders in Barcelona.

Spain’s foreign minister last year also acknowledged the “pain and injustice” inflicted on indigenous peoples during Spain’s conquest.

Spain’s Socialist Prime

Minister Pedro Sánchez has said improving ties with Mexico is a priority for his government, adding there was “light and shadow” in the two countries’ shared history.

Mesoamerica, a region that comprised parts of Mexico and Central America, had an estimated population of 15 million to 30 million people when Spanish conquistador Hernan Cortes arrived in 1519.

After a century of battles, massacres, and plagues, only an estimated one million to two million indigenous inhabitants remained.

The 2026 World Cup will kick off on June 11 with Mexico, event co-hosts with Canada and the United States, playing South Africa in Mexico City. – AFP

Who could be the 2026 World Cup's breakout star?

Kieran Canning



LONDON – World Cups are where rising stars of football quickly transform into global icons.

AFP Sport looks at five of the contenders to become the game's next superstar at this year's finals in the United States, Mexico and Canada:

Nico Paz (Argentina)

The son of former Argentine international Pablo Paz has opted to play for the world champions despite being born and raised in Spain.

A rising star in the Real Madrid academy, Paz has flourished in two years working under Cesc Fabregas since a move to Como in Italy.

Madrid are reportedly set to exercise their buyback option on the 21-year-old.

His technical ability and eye for goal from range has alerted

Europe's other top clubs.

Paz could have the daunting task of filling in for Lionel Messi with Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni expected to manage the 38-year-old's minutes during the champions' title defence.

Desire Doue (France)

Doue has already lit up the biggest stage in club football, winning the man-of-the-match award and scoring twice in Paris Saint-Germain's Champions League final thrashing of Inter Milan last year.

But this will be the 20-year-old's first taste of a major international tournament.

Doue has a battle just to ensure he starts for Les Bleus among a dazzling display of attacking talent that includes Kylian Mbappe, Ballon d'Or winner Ousmane Dembele and Bayern Munich's Michael Olise.

But Doue gave Didier

Deschamps a timely reminder of his quality with his first two international goals in a 3-1 friendly win over Colombia in France's last outing in March.

Nico O'Reilly (England)

O'Reilly, 21, has already earned the trust of Pep Guardiola to become a regular for Manchester City.

Scorer of two goals from left-back in City's League Cup final win over Arsenal in March, O'Reilly began his career as a goalscoring midfielder.

Guardiola has harnessed his blend of height, speed and skill as an attacking weapon from deep and may have solved a problem position for England coach Thomas Tuchel in the process.

England reached the final of Euro 2024 without a natural left-back for the majority of the tournament due to Luke Shaw's lack of fitness.

"What a player," said Guardiola. "He has made an incredible step up and he has had a lot of minutes, but he deserves it."

Endrick (Brazil)

A teenage prodigy who made his Palmeiras debut at 16 and was snapped up by Real Madrid before his 18th birthday, Endrick's hopes of shining at the World Cup have been rekindled by a successful loan move at French club Lyon.

Endrick burst onto the international scene by scoring the winner against England at Wembley two years ago and becoming Brazil's youngest goalscorer since Ronaldo in the process.

Relegated behind international team-mate Vinicius Junior and Mbappe after his big move to Madrid two years ago, the 19-year-old has found his scoring touch since his switch to France in January.

Often compared to another Brazilian great Romario for his squat but powerful physique, Endrick will be hoping to recreate the former's success in scoring five goals as Brazil won the World Cup on US soil in 1994.

Pedri (Spain)

Spain's latest passing metronome, Pedri has proven to be a fitting heir to Xavi Hernandez for both club and country.

After first rising to prominence as an 18-year-old at Euro 2020, Pedri was key to Spain's run to conquering Europe two years ago in Germany, but injury prevented him from featuring in the semi-finals and final.

For Barcelona he has put his fitness troubles behind him under Hansi Flick, playing a starring role in back-to-back La Liga title triumphs over the past two seasons. – AFP

Spurs must play with 'courage' to seal safety: De Zerbi



LONDON – Roberto De Zerbi has urged his Tottenham team to play with "courage and pride" as they seek to secure Premier League survival in today's match at Chelsea.

Spurs, with two games left, are on the brink of safety after a turbulent season, two points clear of 18th-placed West Ham with a game in hand.

A point against the beaten FA Cup finalists would realistically save the club, whose goal difference is far superior to West Ham's, while three points would guarantee survival.

"My players, they have to be ready to play, to play a good game, to play a game with courage, with pride, with work on the pitch and to try to make three points to win the game," De Zerbi said yesterday.

The Italian, appointed at the end of March, said his players deserved to stay up but warned against complacency.

Tottenham have won just once in 35 league trips to Stamford Bridge but are facing a team who have not taken three points in the Premier League since early March.

"We have to play with confidence because in the last four

games, the last five games with me, because we didn't deserve to lose the game in Sunderland, but in the last four, we made eight points," said De Zerbi.

"And if you analyse the performances, I think we could make more points than eight. And for that, we have to have confidence, to be positive.

"Anyway, we can't forget one month ago, what was the situation. We are not safe yet. It's tough in the Premier League. To make one point is tough because all teams fight on the pitch."

De Zerbi was adamant that it was too soon to learn lessons from a disastrous season, with survival not yet guaranteed.

"We have to make other points to achieve our target," he said.

"And then we have the right time to speak for all the problems we have had. But it's not the right moment now to speak and to lose time and to lose energy."

Forward Dominic Solanke is not fit for the Chelsea game but goalkeeper Guglielmo Vicario is available again after hernia surgery.

The game will be played at 3:15 a.m. tomorrow morning, Macau time. – AFP/MPD

Manchester United's Portuguese midfielder Bruno Fernandes (right) smiles on the pitch after their final home appearance in the English Premier League against Nottingham Forest at Old Trafford in Manchester, north west England, on Sunday. Fernandes said he was proud to match the Premier League assists record jointly held by "main names" Thierry Henry and Kevin De Bruyne and is now targeting top spot on the charts. The 31-year-old helped Michael Carrick's men wrap up third place by setting up Bryan Mbeumo for United's third goal in their 3-2 win over Nottingham Forest on Sunday. The Portuguese midfielder is just the third player to provide 20 assists in a Premier League season, joining Arsenal great Henry (2002/03) and Manchester City star De Bruyne (2019/20) in an elite bracket.



– AFP

In this handout photo released by the Iranian Football Federation, members of the Iranian national football team pose before their departure to Turkey in Tehran yesterday. Iran's football team arrived in Turkey yesterday for a training camp and to complete visa applications ahead of the 2026 World Cup, AFP correspondents said.

The 22 players and coaching staff in the "Team Mellini" delegation flew into the Turkish resort of Antalya where they could be seen leaving the airport dressed in navy blue tracksuits.

The players were to stay several weeks before heading to the global tournament that is being co-hosted by the United States, which began bombing Iran on February 28 alongside Israel, sparking war. The team will be based in Arizona in the United States and play all three of their group matches there in spite of the war, which has been temporarily halted by a ceasefire since April 8.



– AFP

Football shorts

Spain midfielder Lopez to miss World Cup with foot fracture

LALIGA BARCELONA – Spain midfielder Fermin Lopez is set to miss this summer's World Cup after his club Barcelona diagnosed him with a foot fracture yesterday which requires surgery.

The 23-year-old would likely have been called up by Spain coach Luis de la Fuente for the tournament this summer in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Fermin suffered the injury during Spanish champions Barcelona's 3-1 win over Real Betis on Sunday in La Liga.

"First-team player Fermin Lopez suffered a fracture in the fifth metatarsal of his right foot during yesterday's match. The player will undergo surgical treatment," said Barcelona in a statement.

Lopez has become a regular for Barcelona over the past two seasons and has seven Spain caps. – AFP

Carvajal to leave Real Madrid at end of season

LALIGA MADRID – Real Madrid captain Dani Carvajal will leave the club at the end of the season, Los Blancos said yesterday.

The Spain international, who has played 450 times for Madrid, has won 27 trophies including six Champions Leagues and four La Liga titles.

"Real Madrid wishes to express its gratitude and affection to one of the greatest legends of our club and world football," said the Spanish giants in a statement.

Carvajal, 34, came through Real Madrid's La Fabrica youth academy and after signing for Bayer Leverkusen in 2012, Los Blancos bought him back the following summer.

"Carvajal is a legend and a symbol of Real Madrid and its academy," said Real Madrid president Florentino Perez.

The defender was hoping to play for Spain at the World Cup this summer but has struggled with various injuries through a disappointing campaign and will not be called up by coach Luis de la Fuente according to Spanish media.

Carvajal will play his last match for the club at the Santiago Bernabeu this weekend against Athletic Bilbao in La Liga, at the end of a second straight season without a major trophy for Madrid. – AFP

PSG's Dembele has treatment for leg issue before Champions League final

LIGUE 1 PARIS – Paris Saint-Germain forward Ousmane Dembele needs treatment for a right calf issue, the French club said yesterday, ahead of the Champions League final against Arsenal later this month.

The Ballon d'Or winner was

substituted after half an hour during Sunday's 2-1 Ligue 1 defeat against Paris FC "as a precaution after experiencing some discomfort in his right calf," PSG said in a statement.

"Dembele will be having treatment over the next few days," the club added.

The 29-year-old did not appear to be struggling when he left the field and boarded the team bus after the match without limping.

"I think it is just due to fatigue," coach Luis Enrique told the press on Sunday.

"It has been a tricky end to the season but now we have two weeks to prepare for the biggest match in our history."

The former Barcelona player has suffered numerous physical setbacks this season, particularly thigh and calf issues.

Meanwhile, Achraf Hakimi resumed individual training on Saturday after a thigh problem, as did Willian Pacho, Nuno Mendes, and Lucas Chevalier.

All three were unavailable for Sunday's match against Paris FC.

PSG clinched a fifth straight French title, and a record-extending 14th overall, with a 2-0 win over nearest challengers Lens last Wednesday.

Luis Enrique's side face Arsenal in Budapest on May 30, when they will attempt to retain the European crown they won for the first time in the club's history last season. – AFP

England see off gutsy France to clinch another Women's Six Nations

Julian Guyer

LONDON – Ellie Kildunne and Jess Breach scored two tries apiece as world champions England sealed an eighth straight Women's Six Nations title with a 43-28 win away to France in Bordeaux on Sunday.

Victory also secured a fifth successive Grand Slam for England and extended their record unbeaten run to 38 games, with their last defeat coming in a COVID-delayed World Cup final in 2022.

Sunday's match was a Grand Slam-decider, with France having also won all four of their previous games in the championship.

But this result was further evidence of England's strength in depth, with the Red Roses missing more than a dozen players due to pregnancy, injury or retirement following last year's World Cup triumph on home soil.

France opened the scoring through a brilliant length-of-the-field move that ended in a try for scrum-half Pauline Bourdon Sansus, but England hit back to lead 26-7 at half-time.

The hosts reduced the favourites' advantage to eight points before England pulled clear again.

'Unstoppable'

"That was a great performance, that was tough and it took a lot at the start," England coach John Mitchell told the BBC.

"I think we have evolved our game. When we created connection at the back, we are unstoppable."

England recovered from going behind through tries from prop Sarah Bern, full-back Kildunne (two) and right wing Jess Breach.

Zoe Harrison's penalty early in the second half left England 29-7 ahead and seemingly in complete command.

France, however, then scored two tries to cut England's lead to 29-21.

Anais Grando went over in



France's prop Assia Khalfaoui (left) is tackled by England's prop Mackenzie Carson during the Women's Six Nations international rugby union match between France and England at the Stade Atlantique in Bordeaux on Sunday. – AFP

the right corner before Bourdon Sansus' sniping break from a close-range scrum caught England napping on the hour mark.

But Breach's second try, following Kildunne's well-timed pass, in the 65th minute effectively sealed England's victory, with fly-half Harrison's conversion making it 36-21.

France played the final 10 minutes a woman down after replacement scrum-half Alexandra Chambon was sin-binned for a high tackle on Claudia Moloney-MacDonald.

And with two minutes left, England had their sixth try when Amy Cokayne went over on the blindside following a close-range line-out.

France's Rose Bernadou scored a try with the last play of the game but England had the match won by then.

"I think it was small mistakes," said France captain Manaé Feleu. "We knew that England can do big things and we gave them what they needed to score the tries after our first try."

"I want to congratulate England, they are world champions and there is a reason for that."

Earlier, Ireland marked their

first stand-alone match at Dublin's Lansdowne Road with a 54-5 rout of Scotland as they finished in third place.

Ireland scored seven tries in a remarkable first half, with No 8 Aoife Wafer crossing twice, to lead 47-0 at the interval.

Scotland avoided being 'nilled' through Aicha Sutcliffe's last-ditch try as they went down to a fourth defeat in five games.

"The first half was the best version of us and we were excellent," said Ireland coach Scott Bemand.

Wales, meanwhile, suffered a record ninth successive loss as Italy enjoyed a decisive 43-24 win in Cardiff.

Wales led 19-17 at half-time but Italy pulled clear after the break and, for the second successive Six Nations, the Welsh finished bottom of the table having lost all five games.

Defeat left Wales coach Sean Lynn with a record of just one win in 15 Tests since he took charge in January last year and he made no attempt to sugar-coat this latest reverse, saying: "What I've just said to the players is that we've just got to be better."

– AFP

Mushfiqur ton leaves Pakistan needing record run chase to beat Bangladesh

Cricket

SYLHET, Bangladesh – Veteran batter Mushfiqur Rahim hit a glittering century as Bangladesh set Pakistan an imposing target of 427 to win the second Test after another commanding day for the hosts yesterday.

Bangladesh posted 390 all out in their second innings on day three with Mushfiqur, who made 137, and Litton Das, who hit 69, putting together 123 runs for the fifth wicket.

The 39-year-old Mushfiqur rolled back the years as he scored his 14th Test century, surpassing Mominul Haque's record of 13 for Bangladesh.

Pakistan openers Azan Awaiz and Abdullah Fazal survived the last two overs of the day without scoring before bad light ended play.

The visitors will need a record chase to level the two-match series after Bangladesh won the opener.

West Indies currently hold the record for the 418 they scored to beat Australia in Antigua in 2003, while Pakistan have never successfully chased more than 377.

Starting the day on 110-3 with a lead of 156 runs, Bangladesh lost skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto for 15 but Mushfiqur and Litton put the Pakistan bowlers to the test.

Litton, who scored a century in the first innings, looked good for another big score but fell to Hasan Ali at deep third-man.

Mushfiqur reached his century off 178 balls with a boundary off Mohammad Abbas - the shot that moved him clear of Mominul into the history books.

It was also his eighth Test century since 2022.

Taijul Islam provided valuable lower-order support, adding 77 runs with Mushfiqur before off-spinner Sajid Khan dismissed him for 22.

Mushfiqur was the last man out as he became Sajid's third wicket in the innings.

Pakistan pace bowling coach Umar Gul, however, said his team will fight on.

"We have two days left and we are mentally prepared. If we bat through the full duration, there is a chance to win we aren't just looking for a draw," said Gul.

"Two or three good partnerships will be very important. To chase 437, you have to be brave and play positive cricket. In cricket, anything is possible."

Bangladesh spinner Taijul was confident the target would weigh on Pakistan.

"When they see the target number, many things may work in their minds. Discipline is very important now," said Taijul.

Pace bowler Khurram Shahzad took four 4-86 while Sajid claimed 3-126. – AFP



Bangladesh's Mushfiqur Rahim celebrates after scoring a century (100 runs) during the third day of the second Test cricket match against Pakistan at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium in Sylhet, Bangladesh yesterday. – AFP

Champagne start in Reims for 2028 Tour de France



REIMS, France – The 2028 Tour de France will embark from Reims in the French champagne region, organisers ASO revealed yesterday.

The three-week race will set off on June 24 and arrive on the Champs-Élysées in Paris on July 16, a week earlier than usual, to accommodate the Los Angeles Olympic Games.

The 'Coronation City' of Reims, where French kings were crowned, was chosen for the Grand Depart over Luxembourg, which is also on the route.

"There were some wonderful candidates. The choice turned on the need to actually start in France with some regularity," race director Christian Prudhomme told AFP.

This year's Tour starts from Barcelona while the 2027 Grand Depart is in Edinburgh, with three days of racing in the United Kingdom.

Reims also hosted the first stage of the Tour de France in 1956. The

city has since hosted eight more stage starts and nine finishes, often sprints, most recently in 2019.

The route for 2028 has not yet been revealed, apart from five other towns visited during the first four stages.

Verdun, with its World War I memorials, the forests and rolling hills of the Ardennes region and the mining towns of Metz and Thionville will also feature during the opening days in north-eastern France.

Charleville-Mezieres, the birthplace of French poet Arthur Rimbaud, and another celebrated champagne town of Epemay are also on the agenda.

The first stage could be suited to sprinters, followed by a more hilly second stage designed to encourage a change in the yellow jersey.

The peloton is then expected to head towards Luxembourg, where there could be more than one stage, a way of rewarding a "fantastic" bid, according to Prudhomme. – AFP

Verstappen's Nürburgring charge ends with a bang and a rattle

Motor racing

PARIS – Max Verstappen's luckless pursuit of an endurance racing victory again ended in disappointment Sunday as his Mercedes broke down when leading the 24 Hours of Nürburgring.

The 28-year-old Dutchman, who is having another difficult season with his Red Bull Formula One team and has threatened to leave the discipline, is competing in a growing number of endurance races in GT3 cars, a category derived from production cars.

He was eagerly awaited by tens of thousands of fans at the legendary German circuit. The car he shared with Spaniard Daniel Juncadella, Frenchman Jules

Gounon and Austrian Lucas Auer was ahead with three hours to go when it pulled into the pits due to noises and vibrations.

Following a lengthy check, mechanics replaced a section of the driveshaft. It returned to the track in 38th place handing victory to a rival Mercedes driven by Maro Engel, Maxime Martin, Fabian Schiller and Luca Stolz.

It was the first time in ten years that the German marque had won the 24 Hours of the Nürburgring.

In March, Verstappen crossed the line first in a four-hour race at the track, but was disqualified because his car had used too many sets of tyres.

Verstappen said Sunday morning on his web site that he

enjoyed the event.

"The competition, endurance style racing with team-mates. A 24-hour race, especially here, is incredibly challenging. That whole combination," but he added that he could not promise to be back next year.

"I will for sure try, but it also depends on my calendar."

The Dutchman is seventh in the F1 driver standings after four Grands Prix. He has constantly criticised new technical regulations on electric and combustion engines and even threatened on several occasions to leave F1 to devote himself to his family and endurance racing, even though his contract with Red Bull in F1 does not expire until the end of 2028. – AFP

Twins wow Cannes with 'mesmeric' tale of Nigeria's rich

Fiachra Gibbons

The Lagos of Arie* and Chuko Esiri's Cannes Film Festival hit "Clarissa" is not one that has ever been seen on the big screen.

The lives, loves, petty snobberies and private torments of some of Nigeria's most privileged people would not seem the stuff to solicit much sympathy in a megacity where the rich float over so much human misery.

But critics at Cannes have found the brothers' sly post-colonial take on Virginia Woolf's novel "Mrs Dalloway" one of the most subtle and affecting movies of the year so far.

"How lucky we are" they took it on, wrote the *Hollywood Reporter's* Lovia Gyarkye, while *The Guardian's* Peter Bradshaw called the movie "seductive" and "mesmeric". Veteran *RogerEbert.com* critic Brian Tallerico declared it "one of the better films I'll see this year".

Waking up as the major discoveries of the festival so far has not phased the twins one bit, they told AFP the morning after its triumphant premiere in the Director's Fortnight section.

'Wired differently'

Fortunes "rise and fall like the currency" in Nigeria, joked Chuko, the marginally younger and more talkative of the two 40-year-olds.

Nor have the inevitable comparisons with other film-making siblings like the Coen brothers, the Dardennes and the Wachowski sisters, who made "The Matrix".

Arie, the older of the two, said shooting with his twin is a kind of superpower, admitting he usually plays the tough guy on set.

"We're twins but we're wired differently. I'm right-handed," said Chuko, "and he's left-handed. He's visual, I'm more narrative."

Two Nigerias

"Clarissa", told in restrained flashback, is as much about post-independence Nigeria as it is about its upper crust, which the brothers say they know only too well, having "been born into it".

Africa's most populous nation "is like any underdeveloped country – the middle disappears and so it's basically just two classes", the poor and the rich, Chuko said. And most of the wealthy in the film have adopted the manners and clipped accents of their old colonial masters, the British.

The twins' tale turns on the intertwining stories of a high-society hostess and the soldier husband of her dressmaker, who returns from fighting Boko Haram jihadists in the north with PTSD** and his faith in humanity shattered by the corruption of his superiors.

Part of the tragedy is that the suffering of the two-decade insurgency "doesn't touch you in Lagos, in the south at all", Chuko said. "It's like being in England and seeing the war in Iraq," he argued.

That disconnect is symbolised by a wonky mosaic mirroring the shape of the country in the hostess's chic seaside home that no one can quite set straight.

"It's a perfect motif of the nation," the director said. It's slightly off and needs correcting." Like Nigeria, "it could be amazing. It just needs a little adjustment" but no one quite knows how.

"The idea of Nigeria is like an ongoing debate. Do we become two countries? Do we stay as one, because it was two countries pushed into one during the colonial era," said Chuko.

African wave

Neon, the distributors of the last

six winners of Cannes' top prize, have already snapped the film up.

The Esiris meanwhile have another film, "Three Souls", about the break-up of a band, already in development and a Nigerian whodunnit to follow.

"Clarissa" is the second African film to have got a rapturous reception at Cannes this year after "Congo Boy" from the Central African Republic (CAR), with two others from Rwanda and Morocco also competing for prizes.

Just like the brothers' first film, the highly-praised "Eyimofe (This Is My Desire)" in 2020, "Clarissa" is punctuated with power cuts, "an everyday occurrence" in Nigeria, Chuko said.

Nigeria followed them to the Cannes premiere, with life imitating art as the projector jammed during the opening credits, forcing organisers to start the film all over again.

An hour and a half later, the critics who had jeered at the embarrassing hitch were on their feet clapping and cheering. – AFP

* "Lagos of Arie" is a descriptive phrase appearing in recent news regarding the Nigerian filmmaker Arie Esiri. The phrase refers to the cinematic depiction of Lagos in the film "Clarissa", major hit at the current Cannes Film Festival. The film was co-directed by twin brothers Arie and Chuko Esiri. – Gemini

** Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. It is a mental health condition triggered by experiencing or witnessing a terrifying event. While many people go through traumatic situations and experience temporary difficulty adjusting, PTSD is characterised by symptoms that persist for months or years and interfere with daily functioning. – Gemini



Nigerian co-director Arie Esiri (right) and Nigerian co-director and screenwriter Chuko Esiri pose for a portrait session on the sidelines of the 79th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France, on Sunday.

– AFP

'Michael' moonwalks back to top of N American box office

LOS ANGELES – "Michael," the biopic about late music superstar Michael Jackson, has returned to the top spot at the North American box office, showing impressive staying power with audiences, industry estimates showed on Sunday.

The film, which chronicles the legendary artist's rise from child star to one of the world's most famous pop icons, took in US\$26.1 million in its fourth week of release, Exhibitor Relations reported.

The Lionsgate movie – which stars Jaafar Jackson, the singer's nephew, in his first acting role – has been criticised for not including any material about allegations of sexual abuse, but fans have nevertheless flocked to hear the King of Pop's iconic hits.

Overall, "Michael" has raked in a massive US\$703.8 million at the global box office.

Holding its own at number two was "The Devil Wears Prada," which earned US\$18 million in US and Canadian cinemas.

The hotly anticipated Disney/20th Century film sequel to the 2006 smash hit about the cutthroat world of high fashion – starring Anne Hathaway, Meryl Streep, Emily Blunt and Stanley Tucci – has raked in about

US\$175.9 million domestically.

Debuting in third place was horror flick "Obsession" from Focus Features, which earned US\$16.1 million.

The low-budget film stars Michael Johnston and Inde Navarrette as a man who makes a sinister bargain to win the affections of the woman he admires – and must bear the consequences.

"Another weekend, another well-made, low-budget horror film over-performing at the box office. This opening is excellent," said analyst David A. Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research, saying it only cost an estimated US\$750,000 to make.

"Mortal Kombat II," a Warner Bros sequel based on the popular martial arts fantasy video game, dropped to fourth place at US\$13.4 million.

And "The Sheep Detectives," a family-friendly mystery film from Amazon MGM, finished in fifth place at US\$9.3 million.

The film stars Hugh Jackman as a shepherd who reads mysteries to his flock in an English village. When he is found dead, the sheep (voiced by Julia Louis-Dreyfus and Patrick Stewart, among others) band together to solve the crime. – AFP

Travolta channels film greats in low-thrust plane movie

CANNES – Superstar John Travolta said on Sunday he had channelled some of cinema's greatest filmmakers into his plane-themed directorial debut which has premiered to mixed reviews.

"Propeller One-Way Night Coach", which will appear on Apple TV at the end of May, is a

loosely autobiographical tale about Travolta's first flight as an eight-year-old with his mother.

"It's an homage to many filmmakers," the 72-year-old plane lover told reporters on Sunday in Cannes.

"You do see Truffaut in this. You do see Lelouch. You do see Fellini.

You do see Bergman," he added, name-checking some of Europe's 20th-century masters.

Critics appear to differ, with some praising the only 61-minute movie as a "slim and winning boyhood reverie of air travel (*Variety*), as "weird and endearing" (*The Hollywood Reporter*) or a "sweet, odd diversion" (*The Guardian*).

But a critic at *The Wire* savaged it as "a disaster that leaves no survivors" while the BBC called it a "dud" that "shows why great actors can be bad directors."

Travolta cast his daughter Ella Bleu as an air hostess, while using other family members in key roles.

"I'm braggadocious, but her [Ella Bleu's] presence in this movie... it's a star is born. It's just magnificent," he told reporters.

Travolta, who starred in "Pulp Fiction" which won top prize in Cannes in 1994, appeared visibly emotional as he received a surprise life-time award at his film's premiere on Friday. – AFP



US director, screenwriter and writer John Travolta poses with an honorary lifetime achievement Palme d'Or award during a photocall of his "Propeller One-Way Night Coach" film at the 79th Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France on Saturday. – AFP

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 16°C~26°C	Manila 24°C~33°C	New York 24°C~34°C	Lisbon 14°C~24°C
Shanghai 22°C~28°C	Bangkok 26°C~33°C	London 11°C~17°C	Rio de Janeiro 21°C~24°C
Hong Kong 23°C~27°C	Tokyo 17°C~28°C	Frankfurt 11°C~18°C	Luanda 21°C~26°C
Taipei 21°C~31°C	Singapore 25°C~33°C	Vancouver 10°C~16°C	Maputo 15°C~26°C
Guangzhou 23°C~27°C	Kuala Lumpur 25°C~35°C	Paris 11°C~17°C	Dili 25°C~31°C
Nanjing 20°C~25°C	Jakarta 24°C~33°C	Moscow 17°C~30°C	São Tomé 25°C~31°C
Guilin 21°C~29°C	Seoul 19°C~26°C	Las Vegas 15°C~28°C	Praia 19°C~27°C
Xi'an 14°C~26°C	Sydney 12°C~20°C	Monte Carlo 13°C~19°C	Bissau 20°C~35°C



Peace and quiet

A man paraglides against the backdrop of the city's skyline in Dharamsala, India on Friday. - AFP

Different world

Children of a school class visit the multimedia exhibition "Polar experience" during a media preview at OBEX Oberhausen in Oberhausen, western Germany, yesterday. The immersive exhibition "POLAR EXPERIENCE" takes visitors on a breathtaking journey into the fascinating world of the Arctic and Antarctic and runs from today to 31 November. - AFP



Celebrating elephants

A woodcarving exhibit is pictured at the Lao Art Museum in Vientiane, Laos, yesterday. International Museum Day is observed every year on May 18. - Xinhua

Apple knight

A bottle of Posh Pomes apple juice, by former England footballer Sir David Beckham, is pictured on press day at the 2026 RHS Chelsea Flower Show in London yesterday. - AFP



Giant float

Performers ride on a float during the Surabaya Vaganza street night parade, part of celebrations marking the 733rd anniversary of Surabaya, Indonesia's second largest city, on Saturday. - AFP



Walk on the wild side

A Chelsea Pensioner wanders through the Alitex garden on the press day ahead of the 2026 RHS Chelsea Flower Show in London yesterday. - AFP