

# Macau planning LRT connection with Hengqin's future light rail: Tam

Tony Wong

Addressing a plenary session in the Legislative Assembly (AL), Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raymond Tam Vai Man yesterday elaborated on the local government's plan to connect Macau's Light Rapid Transit (LRT) with Hengqin's future light rail system.

Tam made the remarks when replying to lawmakers' oral interpellations during a plenary session in the local legislature's hemicycle.

Macau's LRT system currently comprises Taipa Line, Seac Pai Van Line, and Hengqin Line in operation. The Taipa Line serves Taipa and Cotai with its extended section connecting to the peninsula's Barra through the lower enclosed deck of the Macau-Taipa Sai Van Bridge.

The Seac Pai Van Line connects the Taipa Line's Cotai section with Coloane's sprawling Seac Pai Van public housing neighbourhood, while the Hengqin Line connects the Taipa Line's Cotai section with the Macau-side zone of the Hengqin joint checkpoint.

The Hengqin joint checkpoint's Macau-side zone is under the Macau Special Administrative Region's (MSAR) jurisdiction.

The 106-square-kilometre Hengqin island in Zhuhai City is officially known as Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, following its inauguration



Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raymond Tam Vai Man addresses yesterday's plenary session in the Legislative Assembly's (AL) hemicycle. — Photo: GCS

in September 2021. The adjacent island is three times the size of the MSAR.

The in-depth cooperation zone's governance consists of a management committee and an executive committee.

The management committee is the zone's top decision-making body run under a dual director system, jointly led by the governor of Guangdong Province and the chief executive of the MSAR. The zone's executive committee, which is run under the management committee, is the body tasked with the zone's daily functioning and execution of tasks.

There are nine bureaux administered under the zone's executive committee.

The zone's Urban Planning and Construction Bureau released a draft plan in October last year for building a light rail network comprising four lines on the island, tentatively known as L1, L2, L3, L4. The four lines will have a total length of 47 kilometres.

According to the draft plan, the future Line L1 will serve the Hengqin joint checkpoint's mainland-side zone, while the future Line L2 will serve the "financial island" located on Hengqin's northeastern tip.

Currently, Zhuhai, including Hengqin, has

neither a metro system nor a light rail system.

Currently, Hengqin is served by the Zhuhai-Zhuhai Airport Intercity Railway, which runs between Zhuhai's Gongbei and the city's airport.

The draft of the MSAR's 3<sup>rd</sup> Five-Year Plan, which is currently under a public consultation process, outlines the MSAR government's plan to connect Macau's LRT with Hengqin's future light rail system. The plan covers the period between 2026 and 2030.

According to the draft of the plan, the MSAR government plans to complete the connection between Macau's LRT Hengqin Line and the Line L1 of Hengqin's future light rail network.

Macau's LRT Hengqin Line, consisting of two stations, runs between the Hengqin joint checkpoint's Macau-side zone (Hengqin Station) and the Taipa Line's Lotus Station in Cotai.

In addition, according to the draft of the MSAR's 3<sup>rd</sup> Five-Year Plan, the Macau government will study the feasibility of extending Hengqin's future Line L1 to the area around the now-defunct Macau Jockey Club horse-racing track in Taipa. The Macau government will also study the feasibility of linking Hengqin's future Line L2 with Macau's LRT Barra Station.

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## Canada tells US and Mexico it wants FTA renewed



MONTREAL – Canada has formally told the United States and Mexico that it wants to renew the North American free trade agreement (FTA) derided by President Donald Trump, a letter released yesterday said.

Ottawa's minister in charge of Canada-US trade, Dominic LeBlanc, penned the letter a day before heading to Washington for talks with US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer on the future of the United States-Canada-Mexico Agreement (USMCA).

The letter, dated June 1, addressed to Greer and Mexico's Economy Secretary Marcelo Ebrard, says "Canada recommends the renewal of the agreement for another 16 years."

Parties to the USMCA have until

July 1 to indicate whether they simply want to renew the agreement or renegotiate.

Trump signed and praised the USMCA during his first term but now calls the deal "irrelevant."

He has imposed punishing tariffs on key Canadian sectors, like autos, and maintains that the United States does not need anything produced in Canada.

He has also persistently mused about annexing Canada, including this week, when he reacted to a story about Canada's struggling economy by posting "51<sup>st</sup> State!", renewing his claim that Canada would be stronger if absorbed into the United States.

The United States and Mexico wrapped up their initial round of USMCA revision talks last week. — AFP



Artistes perform during the opening ceremony of a media tour in Baoxing County of Ya'an, Sichuan Province, yesterday. The media tour of national parks was launched in Baoxing yesterday. Over 140 people participated in the ceremony. — Xinhua

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## China hopes for sound atmosphere to boost China-UK ties, deepen cooperation: Wang Yi

Foreign Minister Wang Yi yesterday said China hopes the British side foster a sound atmosphere for the development of bilateral ties.

— Story on p. 7

## Trump signs AI order giving govt access to powerful models

US President Donald Trump signed an executive order yesterday creating a voluntary framework under which AI developers will share advanced models with the government before public release.

— Story on p. 11

## Cuba rejects US 'slander' over sanctioned army business group

Cuba yesterday denounced US "slander" against its military-backed conglomerate GAESA, which dominates the island's economy and was the recent target of new US sanctions.

— Story on p. 12

# 9 major school-zone infrastructure projects slated for summer



This undated handout photo provided by the Transport Bureau (DSAT) yesterday shows the government's Roadworks Optimisation Coordination Working Group recently holding a meeting to discuss infrastructure projects.

Ida Cheong

The Transport Bureau (DSAT) announced in a statement yesterday that several major infrastructure projects, nine of which are located along roads frequently used by students commuting to and from school, will be carried out this summer.

Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raymond Tam Vai Man noted in the statement that his bureau will strictly control construction schedules and closely monitor weather conditions, aiming for completion before the new school year begins so that normal traffic flow can be restored on time.

Meanwhile, the bureau will strengthen drainage network improvements and routine maintenance in flood prone areas and develop contingency plans to minimise disruption to traffic and the general public, according to the statement.

The statement pointed out

that this year's road works have successfully been integrated in 47 "coordination zones", of which 20 have either been started or already been completed. Overall progress is in line with expectations, the statement said.

The bureau's engineering coordination team will adjust construction procedures based on actual conditions to reduce the impact on residents' daily routines, including enhancing supervision, requiring contractors to deploy additional workers, accelerating construction, and shortening the project duration wherever possible, the statement said, adding that the traffic facilities along the affected roads will also be reviewed and upgraded as part of the work.

In response to flooding caused by severe weather last year, the government's Roadworks Optimisation Coordination Working Group has taken preventive

measures in advance, the statement said, adding that the drainage improvements are being carried out in flood-prone "black spots", such as the roundabout at Cotai's Estrada do Istmo, such as implementing temporary diversion and sealing measures in the event of serious flooding, with the aim of balancing travel needs with driving safety.

The statement pointed out that as of last month, through cross departmental coordination, the working team has facilitated over 90 integrated construction projects. In order to reduce the frequency of future road excavations, the team continues to promote the pre-installation of utility lines in land plots awaiting development.

To date, the pre-installation work has been completed on nine plots, which will help reduce the need for repeated excavations in the long term and lessen the impact of roadworks on traffic, the statement added. ■

# Mainland woman busted for falsely accusing boyfriend of rape out of revenge: PJ

Armindo Neves

The Judiciary Police (PJ) arrested a woman from the Chinese mainland on Sunday for falsely accusing her local boyfriend of rape out of revenge, PJ spokesman Cheong Un Hong said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Cheong identified the suspect as a 38-year-old surnamed Jiang who claimed to be jobless. Cheong identified the victim as a middle-aged local male.

According to Cheong, Jiang phoned the Judiciary Police on Sunday, claiming that she had been raped by her boyfriend in a hotel guestroom in Zape. She told police that she had met the victim at a casino in February this year, after which they began an intimate relationship, Cheong said. She also alleged that she had been raped by her boyfriend in a hotel guestroom in March and again on Friday last week.

Following the report, PJ officers went to the scene to investigate, where they found no signs of violence or serious coercion during the time both were together, according to Cheong.

In fact, Cheong said, PJ officers discovered that the couple had been involved in an emotional dispute and continued to come and go from the hotel guestroom as normal even after the alleged rape.

Cheong also said that Jiang



Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Cheong Un Hong looks on during yesterday's regular press conference. - Photo: Armindo Neves

refused to undergo a forensic medical examination, and there were no visible injuries, adding that based on a comprehensive assessment of the evidence, PJ officers concluded that the situation was clearly inconsistent with the allegations of rape made by the woman.

According to Cheong, based on the investigation's findings, the Judiciary Police believe that Jiang filed a false report to take revenge on her boyfriend, falsely accusing him of rape.

Cheong did not elaborate for the cause of the dispute, merely saying that it involved an "emotional" issue.

Jiang has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing a charge of falsely reporting a crime to the police. ■

# Macao Union Medical Centre introduces first 3T MRI simulation positioning system

Khalel Vallo

The Islands Healthcare Complex – Macao Medical Centre of Peking Union Medical College Hospital (PUMCH), aka Macao Union Medical Centre, said in a statement yesterday that it has introduced Macau's first 3T magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) simulation positioning system\*, completing the city's first MRI-guided radiotherapy simulation procedure and enhancing precision in cancer treatment planning.

According to the statement, the new system was recently used in Macau's first MRI simulation positioning case involving an

elderly patient diagnosed with meningioma\*\* who had previously undergone multiple surgeries and radiotherapy treatments.

Medical staff used the system to perform a highly precise radiotherapy simulation after new intracranial metastatic lesions were identified, the statement said, noting that the technology enabled more accurate visualisation of the affected areas, laying the groundwork for subsequent radiation treatment.

The 3T MRI simulation positioning system is specifically designed for radiotherapy planning, the statement noted, adding that the equipment addresses limitations

associated with computed tomography (CT) imaging, particularly in soft tissue differentiation and tumour boundary definition.

By combining MRI simulation positioning with dual-modality spectral CT imaging, clinicians can achieve more accurate target localisation, clearer tumour contouring, more precise dose planning and reduced treatment errors, the statement said.

The system is expected to significantly improve the identification of tumours and metastatic lesions in areas including the brain, head and neck, abdomen, pelvis and spine, the statement pointed out, underlining that the enhanced imaging capability can improve treatment effectiveness while minimising radiation exposure to surrounding healthy tissue, reducing complications and side effects, and improving patients' quality of life.

The statement noted that it has established what it described as Macau's largest standalone tumour radiotherapy centre, equipped with advanced technology that meets international standards and provides services covering a broad range of cancer types.

With the commissioning of

Macao's first 3T MRI simulation positioning system, the Macao Union Medical Centre said in the statement that it expects to further strengthen cancer treatment services in the city through more precise radiotherapy planning and improved patient care. ■

\*A 3T MRI simulation positioning system is an integrated hardware and software setup designed to replicate exact, reproducible patient positions for radiation therapy planning.

It pairs MRI-safe immobilisation equipment (like indexed vacuum cushions, thermoplastic masks, and flat-top couches) with external laser systems to perfectly align the patient's anatomy for treatment. - Gemini

\*\*A meningioma is the most common type of primary brain tumour. It originates in the meninges, which are the protective membrane layers surrounding the brain and spinal cord. - Gemini



This undated handout photo provided by the Macao Union Medical Centre yesterday shows an elderly patient being tested by the first 3T MRI simulation positioning system at the public hospital in Cotai.

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### Macau Weather

**VERY HOT.**  
**FINE APART FROM CLOUDY PERIODS.**  
**FORCE 2 TO 4 SOUTH TO SOUTHWESTERLY WINDS.**  
**RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 65% AND 90%.**



28°C~33°C

Source: SMG

## SSM urges residents to take flu & COVID-19 prevention measures

Armando Neves

The Health Bureau (SSM) said in a statement yesterday that Macau's number of consultations for influenza-like illnesses has been rising since mid-February, and it urged residents to take flu and COVID-19 prevention measures.

According to the statement, the number of consultations for flu-like illnesses saw a notable increase in mid-May, with adult cases rising more sharply than children's.

The statement noted that the weekly number of adult emergency department consultations for influenza-like illnesses increased to 740 in the week of May 24 to May 30, compared to the 651 consultations in the same period in April, a rise of 13.6 percent. For children, the weekly number rose from 605 to 656, an increase of 8.4 percent, according to the statement.

So far this year, Macau has recorded four severe influenza cases, comprising three men and a woman, aged between 56 and 71, the statement said, adding that two of the patients required ventilator support, while two of them had not received the seasonal influenza vaccine for the current year.

The statement also said that based on local laboratory testing, the recent positive rate for influenza virus detection has continued to rise, with the overall level of influenza activity now at a moderate epidemic level.

The positive rate increased from 22.7 percent in the same period last month to 23.9 percent last week, exceeding the alert threshold of 15.2 percent, the statement said, adding that among the detected cases, influenza B is the predominant strain, accounting for 76.5 percent.

Meanwhile, the statement noted that the positive rate for SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) detection rose from 1.5 percent in the same period last month to 9.1 percent last week, a fivefold increase. The statement added that although the overall level of COVID-19 activity remains low, it shows a continuing upward trend. ■

### Measures to Prevent Influenza or Other Infectious Diseases

#### ① Overall Health Aspect

- ✓ Receive annual seasonal influenza vaccine
- ✓ Ensure adequate sleep for yourself and your family daily
- ✓ Maintain a balanced diet
- ✓ Regular exercise
- ✓ Avoid tobacco and alcohol

This poster downloaded yesterday from Health Bureau (SSM) official website warns the public against the flu and urges precautions such as getting seasonal flu jabs every year. Translation from Chinese to English by Gemini

## Coutinho urges road safety reforms after boy's fatal zebra crossing accident

Khalel Vallo

Veteran lawmaker José Maria Pereira Coutinho has submitted a written interpellation to the government calling for improvements to the zebra crossings identified as "black spots" affecting pedestrian safety, following the death of a 10-year-old boy who was knocked down and run over by a seven-seater vehicle on a zebra crossing last Wednesday night.

Coutinho, a directly-elected lawmaker, is the long-time leader of the influential Macau Civil Servants Association (ATFPM).

Coutinho signed and uploaded a copy of his written interpellation on his Facebook account on Monday.

In his written interpellation, Coutinho said that the fatal accident, which occurred on the easternmost section of Avenida do Conselheiro Borja (青洲大馬路), has deeply shocked civil society. He noted that many residents flocked to the scene to mourn the death of the boy by offering prayers, flowers, toys, and snacks.

The police said last week that the driver, when approaching the zebra crossing, did not slow down at all and did not give way to the boy, eventually running him over before coming to a stop.

The driver told the police that he did not notice anybody walking across the zebra crossing when he was approaching it.

Coutinho argued in his written interpellation that the tragedy has highlighted a series of long-standing structural traffic issues in Macau, such as the poorly designed locations of some zebra crossings including those set up at road junctions, repetitive roadworks, delays in the implementation of intelligent transport systems, and chronic congestion in key urban areas.

Coutinho also raised concerns about drivers from outside Macau who may be unfamiliar with the city's traffic regulations, road conditions and driving customs. He said that language and cultural differences could further increase road safety risks.

In his written interpellation, Coutinho asked the government what short- and medium-term measures

would be adopted to improve the zebra crossings that have been identified as "black spots" affecting pedestrian safety, including the possible relocation of zebra crossings, replacing them with traffic-light controlled crossings, and the review of the respective road signage for possible improvements, with the aim of ensuring pedestrian safety, particularly children and senior citizens.

He also asked the government what new regulatory, law enforcement and training measures will be introduced for non-local drivers to ensure strict compliance with Macau's road safety standards and reduce the risk of traffic accidents.

In addition, Coutinho called on the government to outline plans for developing a modern intelligent transport system, including real-time traffic data collection and analysis, better coordination of the operations of traffic signals, and enhanced electronic monitoring, with the aim of easing traffic congestion and improving road safety.

Coutinho, who has been a lawmaker since 2005, noted that enhancing the city's road safety, including on the city's bridges, Friendship Bridge in particular, has long been a key public concern, adding that he has repeatedly raised the issue through numerous written interpellations since 2011, including amendments to Macau's Road Traffic Law and strengthening traffic accident prevention measures.

### Family asks public to refrain from organising further memorial activities: school principal

The boy studied at Lin Fong Pou Chai School, located just a stone's throw from the ill-fated zebra crossing. The school is run by the adjacent Lin Fong Temple.

Meanwhile, Ho Man Fai, principal of Lin Fong Pou Chai School, told local Chinese-language media yesterday that the boy's bereaved family is currently making funeral arrangements for their beloved son. Ho quoted the family as saying that they have "fully received" the public's well-wishes, for which they are profoundly grateful.



Lin Fong Pou Chai School Principal Ho Man Fai speaks to reporters at the school yesterday. - Photo courtesy of TDM

Ho said that after a meeting between the family and the school, the family is now appealing to the public to refrain from organising further memorial activities to mourn the passing of the boy, expressing their wish to accompany their child on his final journey in peace.

Ho noted that the school and the local government remain in close contact and meet regularly with the family. All donations collected daily are being handed over to the family in full, with formal receipts completed, Ho said.

With members of the public arriving at Kiang Wu Funeral Parlour to pay their respects over recent days, the family has deeply felt everyone's kindness and thoughts, Ho said.

Ho said that the school will continue to provide emotional counselling services to support students. With the assistance of other counselling organisations provided to the school, the overall situation within the school has largely returned to normal, Ho said.

Ho also said that his school has written to the relevant public entities to highlight the traffic conditions around the school and calls for necessary improvements.

In addition to their heartfelt gratitude to the general public for their care and concern, the family has also expressed gratitude to the government for its support and close coordination with the school, Ho said. ■

## Internship programme opens applications for university graduates

Khalel Vallo

The Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) said in a statement yesterday that applications for its "Career Development Internship Programme 2026" opens today, offering university graduates a three-month internship opportunity across multiple industries aimed at enhancing workplace skills and employability.

According to the bureau, the programme supports the local government's "1+4" strategy for appropriate economic diversification and seeks to help young graduates transition into the workforce through practical work experience.

The statement noted that participants will undertake internships lasting three months. While the internships do not constitute an employment relationship, interns will receive a monthly allowance of 8,000 patacas, or the equivalent amount in yuan, from participating companies, the statement said.

According to the statement, employers are

also required to provide insurance coverage during the internship period. This year's programme has secured support from 77 companies, providing a total of 850 internship positions across nine sectors, including tourism and leisure, finance, technology, social services, retail, construction and engineering, public utilities and civil aviation, the statement underlined.

Some technology-related placements require interns to work in Chinese mainland cities, mainly in Zhuhai or the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, the statement said, adding that around 46 percent of the internship positions have no specific academic discipline requirements, allowing graduates from different educational backgrounds to apply.

Eligible applicants must hold a valid Macau resident identity card (BIR) and have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher from a higher education institution in Macau or

elsewhere in or after 2024, the statement noted.

Fresh graduates will be given priority consideration, the statement said, pointing out that applicants may select up to two internship positions. Meanwhile, interviews for second-choice positions will only be arranged if an applicant is not accepted for their first-choice,

the statement noted, adding that companies will begin contacting eligible applicants for interviews from July 6, while the final admission list will be published on the DSAL website on August 10.

Moreover, the statement noted, applications can be submitted through the Macau One Account platform until July 3. ■



This poster provided by the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) yesterday promotes the "Career Development Internship Programme 2026", which opens today.



# Rediscovering Macau's wild: giant mosquitoes, subterranean ants & 1,400 specimens

William Chan

An exhibition at the University of Macau (UM) Library provides a look into the city's wildlife. Running until August 28, "Rediscovering Macau's Wild: 135 New Insect Records" showcases around 1,400 insect specimens.

The collection represents the work of the late entomologist Emmett R. Easton, who systematically catalogued Macau's urban and rural insect fauna during the 1990s before passing away in 2025 at the age of 87.

Jointly organised by the UM Centre for Macau Studies, the UM Alumni and Development Office, and the University of East Asia Open College Students' Association, the exhibition highlights a biodiversity spanning 11 orders and 104 families, revealing an ecosystem thriving alongside urban areas.

Speaking at the event, UM Vice Rector Rui Martins said that the exhibition aims to reveal the diversity and intrinsic value of Macau's ecosystem and to enhance public awareness of environmental conservation and scientific exploration in the long term. He added that the exhibition pays tribute to Easton's academic achievements and seeks to raise awareness of Macau's ecological resources.

According to the exhibition notes and the "Macao Gazetteer Series: Book of Geography", Macau's insect population distribution differs from global trends. Worldwide, beetles form the largest order, vastly outnumbering all other groups. In Macau, however, butterflies and moths (Lepidoptera) are most numerous with over 577 recorded species, outnumbering beetles more than two-to-one. Researchers attribute this footprint to Macau's compact size and high urbanisation, which creates habitats favouring flying insects over ground-dwelling beetles.

## Insects named after Macau\*\*

Four distinct insect species are named after the city, two of which are endemic and found nowhere else on Earth. The Macau Giant Mosquito (*Toxorhynchites macaensis*) does not bite humans, as adults live entirely on nectar. Its larvae feed on the larvae of disease-carrying mosquitoes, acting as a natural control against dengue fever. The Macau Tiny Ant (*Leptanilla macaensis*), discovered on Ilha Verde hill in 2018, lives underground. Because it is blind and the queen lacks wings, its migration ability is limited, and researchers have not recorded a single specimen since 2020. The other two named species are the Macau Longhorn Beetle, which has appeared on local postage stamps, and the Macau Acrobat Ant, which also inhabits mainland provinces.

## Ornamental & fragile species

Macau hosts various ornamental insects, primarily concentrated among butterflies, beetles, dragonflies, and stick insects. The local skies contain the Paris Peacock butterfly and the Black Rhyothemis, a dragonfly known for its broad wings and a flight pattern that resembles a butterfly. Macau's wetlands shelter the Mortonagrion hirosei damselfly, a species listed as Near Threatened globally due to its specific habitat requirements where fresh and saltwater mix. Additionally, a single species of local firefly (*Pyrocoelia analis*) is recorded in the region, alongside the island's only stick insect species, *Sipyloidea sipyilus*.

## Natural Pharmacy in the Undergrowth

Insects also serve as medicinal resources regulated by the Chinese Pharmacopoeia. The exhibition highlights local species like the Black Cicada (*Cryptotympana atrata*), whose shed skin is common along the edges of woodland areas and used in traditional medicine to clear heat. It also features the Southern Blister Beetle (*Mylabris phalerata*), a source of the anti-tumour compound cantharidin. While unrecorded in the wild in Macau for years, its historic local presence was confirmed via Easton's collection from Hawaii, linking biodiversity to pharmaceutical research.

## The six-legged invaders

Globalisation has introduced at least nine invasive insect species to Macau, presenting ecological and infrastructure challenges. The Red Imported Fire Ant, which arrived around 2004, is aggressive and venomous, causing painful welts in humans and damaging crops. The African Big-Headed Ant nests inside walls and uses its jaws to chew through telephone lines and electrical cables. The Yellow Crazy Ant moves rapidly, spreads via timber shipments, and sprays formic acid that can cause temporary blindness upon contact with eyes.

The exhibition is located in the Exhibition Hall of the UM Library and is open daily from 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. (including public holidays) until August 28. Admission is free.

\* *The Macao Gazetteer Series: Book of Geography*, launched in October 2024, is a 1.3-million-word publication documenting the region's territorial, environmental, and urban development.

\*\*The following section was translated from Chinese and edited into English with the assistance of Gemini AI. The Post cannot independently verify the accuracy of the translated entomological terminology.



Students and guests view the exhibition during Friday's opening ceremony. - All photos taken by Alex Kot, William Chan



## Macau planning LRT connection with Hengqin's future light rail: Tam

Continued from p.1

During yesterday's plenary session, Tam said that the Macau government has reserved space at Macau's LRT Hengqin Station, and Jockey Club Station on the Taipa Line, for the future connection between Macau's LRT and Hengqin's future light rail network.

Tam said that the Macau government aims to achieve a "seamless" connection between Macau's LRT and Hengqin's future light rail network, aligning with the nation's high-speed railway development so that Macau and Hengqin can share the fruits of development achievements.

According to mainland news reports, the central government is planning to build a new high-speed railway that will serve Hengqin.

Tam said that in the long term, Macau's LRT Barra Station will

also be linked with Hengqin's future light rail network.

Tam noted that the LRT Jockey Club Station will become an interchange hub between the current Taipa Line and the future Taipa Central Line, while the LRT Barra Station will become an interchange between the current Taipa Line, the future South Line, and the future West Line.

The Macau government consulted the public early this year on its plan to expand the city's LRT network in the short, medium, and long terms, comprising six new lines, namely East Line Extension Line, Seac Pai Van Extension Line, South Line, West Line, Taipa North Line, and Taipa Central Line.

Tam also said yesterday that the Macau government is committed to getting the LRT South Line project off the ground as soon as possible. ■

## CURB to host public screening of 'ON THE MOVE' cycling activity



This undated handout photo provided by CURB – Center for Architecture and Urbanism yesterday shows a previous edition of the Rooftop Parallel Screening on the rooftop of Ponte 9 – Creative Platform on Rua das Lorchas. "Ponte 9" is Portuguese for "Pier" or "Wharf" No.9.

Rui Pastorin

Non-profit institution CURB – Center for Architecture and Urbanism will be hosting its free-admission Rooftop Parallel Screening on the rooftop of Ponte 9 – Creative Platform on Rua das Lorchas this Saturday, presenting a documentary on its recently held community cycling activity "ON THE MOVE VIII: Coloane Lookout".

The screening event at 6:30 p.m. that day is the second part of the cycling activity, which, for the first time since its inception, was held in Coloane, having taken place on May 23.

A statement by CURB yesterday noted that the activity promoted a "slower and more attentive exploration of the urban and natural landscape".

The screening invites not only

participants and collaborators, but also members of the public. The featured documentary, the statement said, was produced by a team of students from the private Catholic University of Saint Joseph's (USJ) Bachelor of Communication and Media programme. It was coordinated by the Head of the Department of Media, Arts and Technology, Prof. João Brochado.

Meanwhile, invited artist Catarina Cortesão Terra will also be showcasing her related visual artwork at the event.

ON THE MOVE is an initiative that started in 2018. According to the statement, over the years, it has become "a favourite among the local community" and consistently achieves full registration. One can find more details on the group's Facebook and Instagram pages. ■

## Orbis Macau charity raffle tickets on sale till June 30

Rui Pastorin

Tickets for the Orbis Raffle Charity Sale will continue to be sold through June 30, while over 100 prizes worth more than 450,000 patacas will be on offer for its Lucky Draw.

The raffle sale aims to raise vital funds for Orbis's sight-saving programmes and sustainable training to ensure accessible eye care for children in resource-scarce regions, according to a recent statement by the non-profit. Around 90 million children and adolescents worldwide live with a form of vision loss – 90 percent of cases reside in low- and middle-income regions with limited eye care – which poses a severe threat to their futures, the statement said, adding: "Orbis believes that no child's future should be limited by a treatable condition".

Raffle tickets are sold at 10 patacas each, available as e-raffle tickets from Orbis Raffle's online platform, or physical tickets from the Orbis Macau office or nine designated sales points.

Charity Street Sale and promotional events started on Sunday, with more sessions to take place this weekend. The statement said a booth will be set up this

Saturday in the front entrance of The Affiliated Kindergarten of Lou Hau High School, covering Fai Chi Kei district, while Sunday will see a booth at the entrance of Pui Ching Middle School, covering areas around Avenida de Horta e Costa. The booths will run from 12 noon through 6 p.m.

Orbis Volunteers in blue vests carrying donation bags will be in the area to sell raffle tickets. Moreover, eye care tips will be provided and Orbis's global sight-saving work will be introduced, among others, at the booths, the statement said.

On the prizes supported by the Orbis Raffle Gift Sponsors, the statement said, these range from hotel stays with spa and dining experiences to round-trip air tickets and eye examination services.

Moreover, among the prizes are boarding passes to visit the Orbis Flying Eye Hospital during the Goodwill Tour of the 2026 Orbis Flying Eye Hospital – Macau Programme in the first weekend of September, the event celebrating "Orbis's 20<sup>th</sup> year of partnership with the people of Macau", the statement said.

The statement said that the NGO will also conduct its first-ever



This undated and unlocated handout photo recently provided by Orbis Macau shows a child posing with a volunteer while holding up a donation bag.

simulation training programme in Macau, being especially prepared for the eye care teams of their partner hospitals in the Chinese mainland to enhance knowledge and skills for them to safeguard the long-term eye health of communities in rural areas there.

The statement said that the Lucky Draw will be held on July 3, with the results to be out on July 8. More details are available on [www.orbis.org/moraffle](http://www.orbis.org/moraffle). ■

## HK, Guangdong to sync up construction standards

HONG KONG – The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) and Guangdong Province will work together to unify construction standards, the HKSAR government said yesterday.

According to an agreement inked

by the HKSAR government and the Guangdong provincial government, the two sides will set up a working group and a technical committee. Expert committees will also be put together for consultation.

Leveraging Hong Kong's

compatibility with international standards, the move will help enhance the global competitiveness of China's construction industry, said Bernadette Linn, secretary for development of the HKSAR government. – Xinhua

## China unveils latest findings on cultural interactions during Bronze Age

CHENGDU – A research institute in southwest China announced yesterday that carnelian\* artifacts unearthed at the famed Sanxingdui Ruins saw early cross-regional trades, revealing China's commercial network and cultural ties throughout the Bronze Age.

Liu Jiancheng, associate researcher of the Sichuan Provincial Cultural Relics and Archaeology Research Institute, introduced that 11 carnelian beads dating back to approximately 1200-1000 BC have been unearthed from the sacrificial pits at Sanxingdui.

They represent the southernmost carnelian artifacts known from the same period in China, providing crucial evidence for reconstructing the origin and spread of carnelian raw materials and bead ornaments in East Asia, according to Liu.

After conducting a trace element analysis on the carnelian beads, archaeologists discovered that the raw materials did not originate locally, but rather came from the

Yanshan orogenic belt and areas further north, over 1,000 kilometers north of the Sichuan Basin.

They also discovered that these beads resembled raw materials from northern China when compared to carnelian beads discovered in Gansu, Shaanxi, and Beijing around the same time period. The findings suggested that between 1500 and 1000 BC, there existed an extensive and long-lasting network of commercial exchanges that included the southern Mongolian Plateau, the Loess Plateau, the eastern Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, the Central Plains region, and the Sichuan Basin.

"About 3,000 years ago, the Sanxingdui society benefited from a long-distance interactive network that extended to northern China and possibly even the Mongolian Plateau, once again demonstrating that there was extensive and in-depth exchange and interaction among the cultures of various regions in China during the Bronze Age," said Liu.

"The pattern of diverse yet integrated Chinese civilization had already taken shape and developed thousands of years ago," the researcher added.

Carnelian beads suddenly appeared in large quantities at the high-level tombs of the Western Zhou Dynasty (1046 BC-771 BC), which were regarded as a symbol of social hierarchy and cultural identity.

The carnelian beads unearthed at the Sanxingdui sacrificial pits, together with gold wares, jade wares, ivory and other valuable sacrificial objects, indicated that the elite class of the ancient Shu Kingdom at that time could obtain high-value items from faraway regions, and the act of exchange itself was also a display of status and prestige, according to experts. – Xinhua

\*Carnelian is a brownish-red to orange variety of chalcedony, a mineral in the quartz family. – Gemini

# China issues 5-year plan for agricultural, rural modernization

BEIJING – The State Council has issued a plan to accelerate agricultural and rural modernization during the 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan (2026-2030) period.

The plan seeks to accelerate the modernization of agriculture and rural areas to drive Chinese modernization, and has identified key tasks and policy measures for this purpose during the period.

According to the plan, by 2030, the nation's food security will be continuously enhanced; the quality, efficiency and competitiveness of agriculture will be further improved; and the achievements of poverty alleviation will be consolidated and expanded.

The plan laid out two binding targets, including increasing the country's comprehensive grain production capacity to about 725 million tonnes by 2030. It will also aim to raise the overall pass rate of routine agricultural product quality and safety inspections to no less than 98 percent by the same year.

The plan has also proposed 13 other anticipatory targets aimed at improvements in areas including meat production, technology contribution to agriculture, green development in agriculture, sewage treatment in rural areas, and farmers' income, among others, through 2030.

"On the basis of ensuring stable and secure supplies of grain and other

important agricultural products, greater emphasis will be placed on improving quality and efficiency in the agriculture sector," an official with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs said, adding that the plan aims to better meet people's special and higher demand through the increased supply of nutritious and healthy agricultural products.

Guided by the plan, the country aims to greatly enhance its self-reliance and strength in agricultural science and technology, make major strides in transforming agriculture into a modern major industry, and continue to increase farmers' income at a relatively fast pace through 2030.

It also proposes accelerated efforts to build a beautiful and harmonious countryside for people to live and work in, calling for new breakthroughs in the integrated development of urban and rural areas and remarkable achievements in the high-quality development of agriculture and rural areas.

The plan calls for efforts to achieve major breakthroughs in developing new quality productive forces in agriculture, foster and strengthen specialty industries in rural regions, accelerate the comprehensive green transition of agricultural development and promote green agricultural production methods, and improve infrastructure conditions and public services in rural areas, among others.

It also outlines work arrangements for advancing major projects covering high-standard farmlands, agricultural science and technology innovation capacity, and cold-chain logistics facilities for food storage and preservation, stressing efforts to promote AI adoption in agriculture and upgrade the agricultural product processing industry.

Faster adoption of agricultural technology has continued to lift agricultural productivity in China in recent years. In 2025, China's grain production reached about 714.9 million tonnes, marking the second straight year grain output had stayed above 700 million tonnes. Last year, the contribution rate of agricultural scientific and technological progress exceeded 64 percent, while the comprehensive mechanization rate of crop cultivation and harvesting reached 76.7 percent.

With regard to greater sci-tech contribution to agriculture, the new plan has set an anticipatory target of raising the contribution rate of sci-tech progress in boosting agricultural development to 67 percent by 2030.

According to the plan, the country will seek to scale up more pioneering industries, such as intelligent design breeding, new-energy agricultural machinery, low-altitude agricultural economy, agricultural bio-manufacturing, and new foods over the coming years. – Xinhua



A university students chorus sings during an event marking the upcoming World Environment Day in Beijing yesterday. The even focused on policies and practices for addressing climate change. World Environment Day falls on June 5. – Xinhua

## Chinese car brands expand presence in Spanish market

### Analysis

BARCELONA, Spain – Chinese car brands expanded their presence in Spain's automotive market in the first four months of 2026, accounting for 13.7 percent of all new vehicle registrations, according to official industry data.

Official figures show Chinese brands accounted for 55,972 car registrations out of a total of 407,389 vehicles registered in Spain between January and April, meaning roughly one in seven new vehicles sold during the period carried a Chinese brand.

Raúl Morales, director of communications at Faconauto, the federation that represents Spain's automotive dealership associations, told Xinhua that Chinese brands' share rises to 20 percent when measured against sales to private individuals and families.

"We're looking at about 30 percent market share within two or three years," Morales said. "With market penetration already reaching 20 percent in the first quarter, we can expect that share to grow even more by the end of this year."

Morales said the rapid growth mirrors developments in other markets.

"We have seen in other mature markets how the figures for the share of Chinese brands grew very quickly. In Chile, for example, 40 percent market penetration was achieved in 10 years," he said.

He attributed the growth to a deliberate and well-funded brand-building effort.

"Chinese firms have invested a lot of money and effort into positioning their brands, and they have done it very quickly so that their vehicles are considered quality products at a competitive price," Morales said, describing this as an important advantage in a market that is "very sensitive to price."

Distribution strategy has also played a decisive role. Rather than building parallel retail networks from scratch, Chinese automakers have plugged into Spain's established dealership infrastructure.

According to Morales, Chinese brands expanded their sales network to 600 outlets last year, and he expects the figure to reach 1,000 by the end of year.

"They have opted for established dealers with a lot of experience, and those businesses are also part of the key to the success of the Chinese brands," Morales said.

With new model launches continuing to drive consumer interest and the dealership networks still expanding, Morales expected Chinese brands to become an increasingly familiar presence in Spain's automotive market.

"I think that during this year the popularity of Chinese brands will stop being news, just as it is not news that a Spanish buyer might look at a Korean, Japanese, European, or American brand," he said.

"Considering a Chinese brand will stop being news because it's a product that's very quickly becoming normal in the Spanish market," he added. – Xinhua

## Shipping industry expo in Tianjin highlights AI opportunities

TIANJIN – The 4<sup>th</sup> Tianjin International Shipping Industry Expo (TISIE) opened in north China's Tianjin Municipality yesterday, showcasing growing AI opportunities in the shipping industry.

Themed shipping to the world and navigating towards the future with AI leading new opportunities for the development of ports and shipping, the four-day expo covered fields such as green shipping, maritime equipment, logistics services and more.

The TISIE has been held annually in Tianjin since 2023 to promote global shipping cooperation, industry investment and trade exchange.

Xu Kai, chief information officer of Shanghai International Shipping Institute, said that China has built the world's largest network of automated container terminals, with notable breakthroughs in unmanned shore cranes, intelligent guided vehicles and automated yards.

"Terminal equipment should not only operate efficiently but also perform regional dynamic optimization based on real-time fluctuations in vessel arrivals, sudden weather changes and instantaneous cargo flow surges," Xu said. "This requires AI to evolve from executing commands to autonomous reasoning, and from single-machine intelligence to group collaboration."

Waqas Samad, CEO of Lloyd's List Intelligence, said that with the



Fairgoers look at exhibits during the 4<sup>th</sup> Tianjin International Shipping Industry Expo in Tianjin yesterday. With the theme of "Shipping to the World and Navigating towards the Future," the expo kicked off in the northern port city yesterday. This year's expo has attracted over 400 exhibitors and is expected to draw over 60,000 visitors. – Xinhua

world's largest fleet, and as the world's biggest shipbuilder and producer of shipping containers, China plays a key role in today's shipping landscape. But more importantly, China represents something significant about the future of shipping, not just scale and infrastructure, but the combination of connectivity, technology and intelligence.

"AI will reshape our industry in practical and powerful ways," said Thomas Sim, President of the International Federation of Freight Forwarders Associations.

He noted that AI should empower freight forwarders, not replace their professional judgment; enhance human capability, not remove accountability; and strengthen the role of freight forwarders as trusted

logistics architects, not reduce them to platform users.

Feng Boming, vice president of China Merchants Group Limited, said that AI was evolving from a conversational assistant that supports decision-making and improves efficiency to an action-oriented intelligent agent capable of autonomously understanding intentions, invoking tools and executing specific tasks.

"However, greater autonomy also entails greater security responsibilities," Feng said. "We must clearly recognize that behind AI's empowerment of thousands of industries, various new types of security risks and governance challenges continue to emerge, posing entirely new challenges to the orderly development of the industry and the safe operation of the sector." – Xinhua

## Chinese automaker XPeng Motors leads Israel's electric car sales in Jan-May

JERUSALEM – Chinese automaker XPeng Motors led Israel's electric vehicle (EV) market in the first five months of 2026, according to data released yesterday by the Israel Vehicle Importers Association.

XPeng, which offers the mid-size electric crossover SUVs G6 and G9, along with the executive sedan P7 in Israel, sold 2,385 units between January and May.

America's Tesla ranked second with 1,843 units sold during the same period, followed by China's Changan Automobile with 1,738 units.

Chinese brands accounted for 78.4 percent of Israel's EV sales during the first five months, selling 12,718 units.

In the broader automotive market, including gasoline, hybrid and electric cars, Chinese manufacturers led overall sales with 62,133 units. South Korea followed with 24,575 units, while Japanese automakers sold 15,527.

China's Chery led the broader market with 33,844 vehicles sold, ahead of Japan's Toyota with 13,612 and South Korea's Hyundai with 13,586. – Xinhua

## VP Han meets UK foreign secretary

BEIJING – Vice President Han Zheng met with UK Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper in Beijing yesterday.

The two countries' leaders agreed in January to develop a long-term and consistent comprehensive strategic partnership between China and the UK, opening a new chapter of bilateral relations, Han said.

Noting that improving bilateral ties serves the interests of the people of both countries, Han said both sides should jointly shoulder the responsibilities of major countries, strengthen strategic communication, consolidate the positive momentum of bilateral relations, explore new opportunities, and boost people-to-people exchanges.

He called on both sides to work together to practice true multilateralism, jointly advance global governance reform, and bring greater stability and certainty to the world.

Cooper said the UK and China share broad common interests and cooperation potential in areas such as trade and investment, artificial intelligence, green development and addressing climate change.

The UK is ready to work with China to implement the important consensus reached between the leaders of the two countries, engage in constructive dialogue and cooperation, and jointly address challenges, Cooper said.

– Xinhua



Vice President Han Zheng (right) shakes hands with UK Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper in Beijing yesterday.

– Xinhua

## New Bulgarian govt to boost cooperation with China: Deputy PM

SOFIA – Bulgaria is committed to strengthening cooperation with China, the country's Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Poulev said yesterday.

Poulev, who is also minister of economy, investment and industry in Bulgaria's new government, made the comments at a Bulgaria-China Trade and Investment Cooperation Roundtable. The event was jointly organized by the Chinese Embassy in Bulgaria, and the Confederation of Employers and Industrialists in Bulgaria.

Bringing together more than 20 Chinese companies interested in investing in Bulgaria and seeking local business partners, as well as Bulgarian government institutions and business representatives, the one-day event was aimed at promoting practical cooperation, investment opportunities, and direct business exchanges between the two sides.

"From the government's perspective, I want to assure you that there is a very strong political

will to strengthen our cooperation and turn a new page in our relations with the People's Republic of China," Poulev said.

Noting the steady growth in trade exchange between the two countries, he said: "We are obliged, with joint efforts, to promote direct investments and seek win-win cooperation in a number of areas."

The new government is taking targeted actions to create a competitive and predictable environment for investors, Poulev added.

Addressing the event, Chinese Ambassador to Bulgaria Dai Qingli said that this was the first business event organized jointly between the two countries since the new Bulgarian government came to power last month.

China and Bulgaria have broad scope for cooperation in many areas, such as high-tech cars, high-tech manufacturing, culture and tourism, as well as agricultural product processing, Dai said.

– Xinhua

## China hopes for sound atmosphere to boost China-UK ties, deepen cooperation: Wang Yi

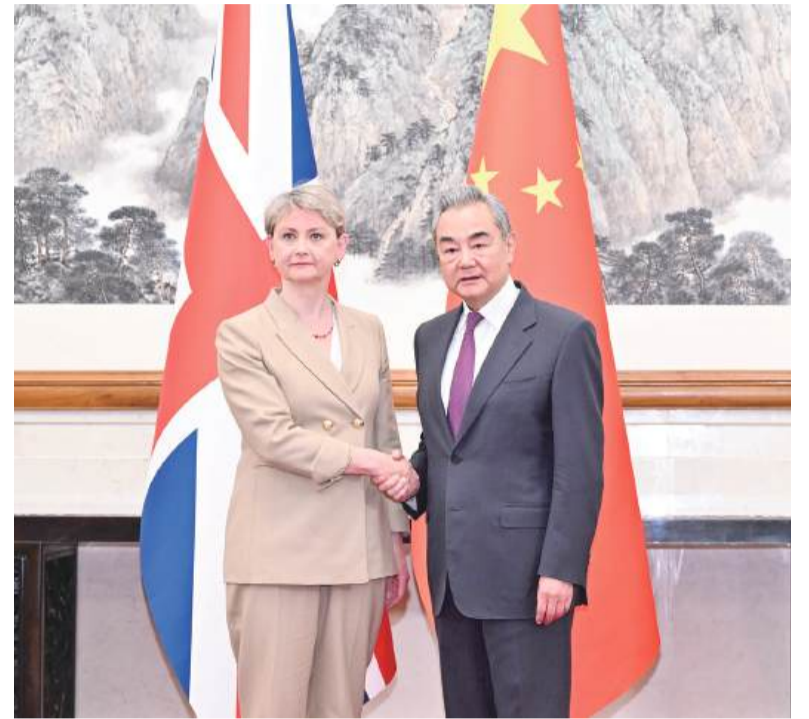
BEIJING – Foreign Minister Wang Yi yesterday said China hopes the British side will provide Chinese enterprises with a fair, just and non-discriminatory business environment, and foster a sound atmosphere for the development of bilateral ties and the deepening of cooperation between the two countries.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks when holding the 11th China-UK Strategic Dialogue with UK Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper in Beijing.

Noting that the leaders of both sides agreed to develop a long-term and consistent comprehensive strategic partnership when British Prime Minister Keir Starmer visited China at the beginning of this year, Wang said that at present, exchanges and cooperation in all fields between the two countries have been fully restored and are gradually getting back on track.

Wang said both sides should work to strengthen communication, implement the important consensus reached by the leaders of the two sides, uphold the positioning of China-UK ties as a long-term and consistent comprehensive strategic partnership, strengthen high-level exchanges, and promote the achievement of more practical and tangible results to jointly contribute to world peace, stability, prosperity and development.

The outline of China's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030) is not only China's domestic development blueprint but also an opportunity list for the rest of the world, Wang said, adding that it is highly aligned with UK's modern industrial strategy, calling on both



Foreign Minister Wang Yi (right), also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, shakes hands with UK Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper in Beijing yesterday, on the sidelines of the 11th China-UK Strategic Dialogue.

– Xinhua

sides to seize opportunities for mutual success.

As permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, China and the UK should take the lead in following the right and impartial path, safeguard the fruits of victory in World War II, abide by the UN Charter, adhere to true multilateralism, and jointly promote the building of a more just and reasonable global governance system, Wang noted.

Cooper said that the long-term and consistent comprehensive strategic partnership is of great significance and in line with the interests of both sides. At a time when the international situation is turbulent and complex, it is more important than ever for the UK and China to strengthen dialogue

and cooperation to jointly address global challenges, she added.

The UK is willing to work with the Chinese side to promote institutional dialogue, and deepen cooperation in economy and trade, finance, energy, artificial intelligence, climate change and other fields, said Cooper.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations with China, the policy pursued by the UK on the Taiwan issue has remained unchanged and will not change, Cooper said, adding that the British side is willing to continue to engage in candid dialogue with the Chinese side, handle differences constructively and properly, and promote the healthy and stable development of UK-China relations.

– Xinhua

## All Chinese across Taiwan Strait have shared duty to safeguard national sovereignty, maritime rights: spokesperson

BEIJING – The two sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to one and the same China, and all Chinese people on both sides of the Strait have the shared responsibility to uphold national sovereignty and maritime rights and interests, a foreign ministry spokesperson said yesterday.

Spokesperson Mao Ning made the remarks at a daily press briefing when asked to comment on Taiwan authorities' affirmation for the so-called maritime delimitation talks between Japan and the Philippines. The countries announced they will delimit the area east of the Taiwan island.

According to China's domestic law and international law including the United Nations Convention on

the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), China has exclusive economic zone and continental shelf in the area involved. As per UNCLOS, the delimitation of the exclusive economic zone and the continental shelf between states with opposite or adjacent coasts shall be effected by the states concerned by agreement on the basis of equity, Mao said.

"Any delimitation concerning waters to the east of Taiwan must have China as a party to the talks," she said.

Japan and the Philippines' attempt to bypass China and initiate the so-called maritime delimitation talks constitutes a severe violation of UNCLOS and other international laws and basic

norms governing international relations, she said, adding that it also seriously infringes on China's maritime rights and interests and China will not allow this.

The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) authorities, in pursuing selfish political gains, have gone so far as to put the Chinese nation's vital interest up for sale, a move that betrays ancestors and breaches all moral boundaries.

"This once again shows that these separatists have completely forfeited the national stance and degenerated into traitors to the nation. What awaits them is contempt from Chinese on both sides of the Strait and the judgement of history," Mao said.

– AFP

## Word nerds have a weekend on the tiles at Thailand's Scrabble title

Sally Jensen

BANGKOK – If he were no longer physically able to play Scrabble, 86-year-old Tan Jin Chor said he would “shut the lights and call it a day”, but his love of the word game has kept the veteran verbophile competing.

The Malaysian senior started playing the globally popular board game with friends over beers, but has now spent tens of thousands of dollars travelling the world to Scrabble tournaments.

“Competitiveness, I like that, I enjoy that. Even though I lose most of the time,” he told AFP at the finals of a major Scrabble championship in Bangkok on Monday.

When Tan first started competing seriously 35 years ago, prizes could include a pair of socks, a tie, or sometimes a plaque.

“Nowadays, it's for money... that's the main thing I've found is different from the old days,” he said.

A US\$10,000 top prize brought some 450 serious Scrabblers from 30 countries to the Thai capital at the weekend for back-to-back matches at the four-day Causeway Challenge.

Onomatopoeia could not adequately describe the sound of Scrabble tiles being shaken in a bag, a logophilic rattlesnake hiss

that filled the Bangkok hotel room.

Singaporean organiser Michael Tang called his creation a “household brand name among the Scrabble community globally”.

“Scrabble is not about English,” he said.

“It's really about memory, about strategy, it's mathematics... you have to draw the tiles, so there's a luck element.”

Tang's favourite word from the tournament was “craziest” - a superlative he used to describe himself for his plan to host a thousand competitors at the next tournament in 2028.

Players clutched red bags above their heads in a show of fair play as they chose their lettered tiles.

“Scrabble for me, it has... there's a certain je ne sais quoi,” said tournament winner David Eldar, adding that a lot depends on luck.

“I'm not the best player in the room, but I won,” the 36-year-old Australian said, adding he would be “paying for a lot of beers tonight”.

“It's nerve-racking, it's mentally stimulating, it's challenging. It's awesome.”

### ‘A bit nerdy’

British woman Natalie Zolty was hesitant when she began

competing professionally 10 years ago.

“I was thinking I don't know... this is a bit strange. Everybody's a bit nerdy,” Zolty said.

It takes “a lot of time” to get to a high standard in a competitive, male-dominated game, she said, and “some women don't have that time”.

Scrabble has since changed the 61-year-old maths teacher's life.

She said a lot of people at the event were not native English speakers.

“Most of the top players are maths-based because it's all about the probabilities and playing the odds... you don't need to know what the words mean,” she said.

The game demands eidetic knowledge of the English vocabulary – not necessarily spoken proficiency – and maths skills to exploit the points letters are assigned.

“Unfortunately, I'm very bad at maths,” Malaysia's Tan said. “So I'm not like those top players... I'm middling-rank.”

He said he would take part in a Malaysian seniors' championship this coming weekend, despite being certain that he wouldn't win.

“I lose many more games than I win,” he said.

“But I enjoy it. I love it.”

– AFP



This picture taken on Monday and released by North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) yesterday shows North Korean leader Kim Jong Un (centre) congratulating the players who won the AFC Under-17 Women's Asian Cup, at the Workers' Party of Korea Central School for Cadres in Pyongyang.

– AFP

## S Korea drops gender-neutral hospital room plan after backlash

SEOUL – South Korea has scrapped a proposal to end mandatory gender segregation in hospital inpatient rooms, a health ministry official confirmed to AFP yesterday, after public backlash over safety.

Several countries such as Japan and Canada have introduced gender-neutral facilities, a move that has sparked debate and pushback from critics who argue privacy concerns, as well as safety risks including sexual misconduct in shared spaces.

South Korea is a global technology and cultural powerhouse, but remains socially conservative.

The health ministry unveiled the plan last month as part of broader regulatory reforms to make it easier for family members and couples to share hospital rooms.

“Gender segregation will be maintained as under the current system,” a health ministry official told AFP yesterday.

Exceptions to intensive care units, in which patients require close monitoring regardless of sex, and two-bed rooms occupied by

family members would remain in place, the health ministry added.

Under the now withdrawn proposal, South Korean hospitals would no longer have been required to separate patients by gender in inpatient rooms, a rule currently enforced and punishable by up to 15 days' suspension for violations.

The health ministry had proposed the change, arguing that some hospitals already allowed married couples to share two-bed rooms and that the regulation was no longer necessary.

It said the decision to withdraw comes after reflecting on the response from the public.

The proposal drew strong opposition with more than 4,000 comments posted on the government's legislative notice website.

“There could be a possibility of sex crimes targeting women,” one commenter wrote.

Another described the proposal as an “ignorant bill that disregards the fear and anxiety of female patients.”

– AFP

## Bear goes on rampage in Japan, injuring 4 people

TOKYO – A bear attack left four people injured in two factories and a residential area in northern Japan's Fukushima yesterday, police and media reports said.

A record 13 people were killed by bears in Japan last year, and there has been a jump in sightings as the animals emerge hungry from hibernation.

“A bear-related human injury incident... occurred in Fukushima City, injuring four people,” the prefectural police said in a statement.

The bear was first spotted in a car parts factory, prompting an emergency call explaining that “employees had been bitten”, the *Yomiuri Shimbun* daily reported citing police and fire department officials.

As the bear continued its rampage, two other people were injured, one in a residential area and the other on the premises of an electronic equipment manufacturer nearby, the *Yomiuri* said, adding that the animal was thought to have

remained inside the factory.

The report said one of those attacked was heavily injured, while the rest suffered only mild injuries.

In the last fiscal year to March, bear sightings nationwide topped 50,000, more than double the previous record set two years earlier, according to official data.

The animals were seen entering homes, roaming near schools and rampaging through supermarkets and hot spring resorts on an almost daily basis.

Record sightings have been reported again this year as the bears emerge from their winter slumber, according to local media.

In April, bear attacks killed one person and injured five others, according to the environment ministry.

There have also been more than a dozen bear sightings reported on the outskirts of Tokyo this year, with a Russian man in his 30s reportedly mauled as he hiked in the city last month.

– AFP



Residents look on amid search operations in the aftermath of an explosion in Kaung Tat village, in Namhkam Township in Myanmar's Shan state yesterday. A blast in northern Myanmar killed dozens of people on Sunday, two rescue workers said, with rebels controlling the region saying it was caused by the accidental detonation of mining explosives. One first responder in Shan state's Namhkam district, where the blast occurred, said 46 people were killed, including six children, and more than 70 others were injured.

– AFP

## Storm injures 15 in Japan, prompts evacuation calls

TOKYO – A severe tropical storm battered southwestern Japan yesterday, injuring 15 people and prompting calls to evacuate for hundreds of thousands of people due to flooding and landslide risks.

Storm Jangmi – which was downgraded from a typhoon – also knocked out power to tens of thousands of homes and grounded hundreds of flights.

But the storm was heading northeast toward Tokyo, where authorities warned of possible transport disruptions and school closures for today.

Jangmi led to evacuation advisories for more than 800,000 people in Miyazaki and Kagoshima prefectures on the southern main island of Kyushu, the Japanese government said.

Torrential rain and strong winds that felled a 10-metre tree

in Okinawa were seen in images reported by local media.

Some 17,000 households on the island and more than 30,000 in the southwestern Kagoshima region were without power yesterday morning.

The Fire and Disaster Management Agency said Jangmi had also injured 15 people in Okinawa.

Public broadcaster NHK reported that injuries were caused by Jangmi blowing objects into cars and strong winds causing people to lose their footing.

At 4:00 p.m. [local time], Jangmi was approaching the southern tip of Kyushu, the southernmost island of Japan's four main islands, with the maximum gust speed of 90 kilometres per hour, the weather agency said.

The storm was expected to move north-eastward to get closer to Tokyo today.

Top government spokesman Minoru Kihara warned that public transport in Tokyo and nearby cities could face disruptions today as the storm approaches.

“For those of you who are living in areas likely to be affected by the storm, please pay close attention to evacuation information issued by your municipalities, and stay mindful of early evacuation,” Kihara told a news conference.

“Please remain vigilant and make sure you take action to protect your life.”

Some schools in Tokyo announced closures for today citing safety of children during commuting.

Japan's two biggest airlines All Nippon Airways and Japan Airlines cancelled a combined 600 flights scheduled for Monday to today.

– AFP

## Prabowo sacks head of free meal scheme

JAKARTA – Indonesia's President Prabowo Subianto removed yesterday the head of the body responsible for his signature free school meals programme, which has been blighted by mass food poisonings and corruption claims.

The much-hyped billion-dollar scheme was the flagship policy of Prabowo's 2024 election campaign.

The government says it has provided meals to more than 61 million people by March, but tens of thousands of people have fallen ill since the programme was launched in January last year.

"The president has decided to make changes to the leadership of the National Nutrition Agency," State Secretary Prasetyo Hadi told reporters in Jakarta, citing food quality among various concerns behind the move.

Critics have called for the programme to be suspended over hygiene concerns and accusations of corruption.

"The government will continue to ensure that throughout the ongoing evaluation process, all programmes of the National

Nutrition Agency will continue to run as they should," Prasetyo said.

Dadan Hindayana, an entomologist who led the agency since its inception, was replaced by his deputy, Nanik Sudaryati Deyang.

Last month, anti-graft watchdog Indonesia Corruption Watch filed a complaint against Dadan citing alleged budget irregularities.

Dadan told parliament last year the programme was responsible for at least 11,000 poisoning cases, with over 600 people hospitalised.

Prabowo has also acknowledged problems and vowed to discipline anyone found guilty of wrongdoing.

More than 20 percent of children in Indonesia are affected by stunting caused by severe malnutrition.

The government hoped the scheme would provide meals for at least 82.9 million children and pregnant and breastfeeding women – about one-third of the country's population.

It was among the first budget items to be cut back as Jakarta moved to counter the economic impact of the Middle East war. – AFP

## Mass weddings help Afghan youth bypass costly marriage customs amid economic woes

KABUL – Amid Afghanistan's prolonged economic hardship, high unemployment and costly wedding traditions, hundreds of young couples are turning to mass wedding ceremonies as an affordable way to begin married life.

On the western outskirts of Kabul, around 400 couples on Monday exchanged wedding vows in a mass wedding ceremony made possible by a local charity and generous donors. For many participants, whose engagements had stretched on for years due to financial difficulties, the event marked the end of a long wait and the beginning of a new chapter.

Among them were Hussain and Ameena, a young couple whose marriage had been delayed for more than three years because they could not afford a traditional wedding.

Hussain, a 28-year-old IT professional, sat beside his bride with a broad smile as they joined hundreds of other couples in celebrating the occasion.

"Today, I am truly happy to be part of a simple, meaningful and affordable wedding ceremony," Hussain told Xinhua.

Now married, he is looking ahead with optimism. "We hope to expand our graphic design business in the coming years," he said.

Wedding celebrations in Afghanistan are often expensive, placing a heavy financial burden on families. Traditional ceremonies commonly involve gatherings of 1,000 to 2,000 guests, along with substantial bride-price payments from the groom's family to the bride's family.

These payments, known locally as "Toyana," "Qaleen," "Sheer Baha" or "Walwar," remain a deeply rooted custom across much of the country.

Depending on a family's social standing and location, such payments can range from 200,000 to more than 1 million afghanis (about US\$3,200 to US\$16,000). The high costs often force young people to postpone marriage for years, while some seek employment abroad through risky, irregular migration routes in hopes of earning enough money to start a family.

Baqer Saeed, organizer of the mass wedding, said cultural attitudes toward marriage expenses need to change.

"A successful marriage should be built on mutual understanding and realistic expectations, not excessive spending," Saeed told Xinhua.

He said mass weddings offer a practical solution because they relieve families of overwhelming financial pressure while allowing couples to begin married life with confidence and peace of mind.



A bride attends a mass wedding ceremony in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Monday. – Xinhua

Organizers of mass weddings often provide newlyweds with basic household goods and kitchen utensils, helping them establish their new homes with necessities.

As poverty and unemployment continue to affect millions of Afghans, many young people remain unable to marry or spend years waiting to do so. Supporters argue that promoting simpler and more affordable weddings could help alleviate social pressures, enhance family stability, and provide young people with a more realistic path toward marriage.

The Afghan government has also urged citizens to abandon extravagant wedding customs and adopt more modest and affordable practices.

Saeed also encouraged more families to embrace simpler wedding ceremonies, particularly given Afghanistan's challenging economic conditions.

"If we want to build strong families and a stable society, we need to move away from extravagant wedding celebrations and unnecessary expenses," he said.

Mohammad Aman Etemadi, a construction worker who supports a family of five, shared a similar view.

Dressed in new clothes for the occasion, Etemadi described the event as both encouraging and timely.

"Given the current economic situation in Afghanistan, initiatives like this are extremely valuable for young people," he said. "Many are facing serious financial difficulties, and ceremonies like these are far more affordable."

According to Etemadi, a traditional wedding can cost between 700,000 and 800,000 Afghans, or roughly US\$11,000 to US\$13,000.

"I would like to see similar programs expanded to help more young people and families across Afghanistan," he added. – Xinhua

## Party chief makes Nepal's first India trip since uprising

NEW DELHI – Nepal's ruling party chief called for closer economic and strategic cooperation with India yesterday, on the first high-level visit since deadly 2025 anti-corruption youth protests toppled the previous government.

But this trip to a key ally was not by Nepal's new prime minister – 36-year-old rapper-turned-politician Balendra Shah.

Shah has shunned meetings with several foreign envoys to Nepal and, according to his aides, has said he will not travel abroad for his first year in power to focus on the many domestic challenges, not least the ailing economy.

The first visit to key ally India instead was made by Rabi Lamichhane, a former deputy prime minister and interior minister, who is president of the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP).

It won a landslide victory in March parliamentary elections, led by Shah.

Former television host Lamichhane retains a pivotal role in power, and the lawmaker is expected to meet Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, RSP spokesman Manish Jha told AFP.

Nepal, a landlocked Himalayan nation of 30 million people, must ensure a delicate diplomatic balance between its two giant neighbours, India and China.

India has long considered Hindu-majority Nepal as a traditional ally, with open borders along the plains.

Kathmandu's largest trading partner is India, accounting for 63 percent of imports, or US\$8.6 billion, followed by China at 13 percent, or US\$1.8 billion, according to World Bank figures.

"A stable and prosperous Nepal is a natural guardrail along India's northern border, whereas a politically fractured Nepal makes India nervous about instability in the neighbourhood," Lamichhane wrote in *The Hindustan Times* yesterday.

"Nepal's economic development is, therefore, a strategic necessity for India."

### Hydropower and cricket

Shah has spoken little since coming to

power, and issued his victory message in a rap song, where he promised to "run like a leopard" to ensure his nation's success.

The visit takes place as a long-running border controversy resurfaced, over Nepali territorial claims to the Lipulekh Pass, where India, China and Nepal meet.

The icy 5,334 metres-high pass has been used by Indian pilgrims to visit Mount Kailash – sacred to Hindus and Tibetan Buddhists, but also connects India to China directly.

In 2020, protests erupted in Nepal after India inaugurated a new road leading to the pass.

On Sunday, Shah said in parliament that both India and Nepal had "encroached" on each other's territory, and said they should "resolve the issue as friends". The comments sparked uproar in Kathmandu's parliament.

Analysts say Lamichhane's visit could help renew ties.

"There has been a vacuum of political dialogue between Nepal and India for a while," Kathmandu-based foreign affairs analyst Chandra Dev Bhatta said.

"So this visit is a positive step towards opening engagements and clearing any misunderstandings."

Lamichhane said that Nepal could offer energy-hungry India hydropower, from its many dams on rivers running off the Himalayas.

"Nepal's hydropower potential is no longer just a domestic asset; it is a clean, green engine capable of powering the industrial corridors of a rising India," he wrote.

He also noted that Nepal shared the same love of cricket as India, with fans watching the just completed India Premier League (IPL) T20 tournament.

"We have also been deeply contemplating how Nepali players and Nepali stadiums can be integrated into the IPL franchise," he said.

Nepal are cricketers minnows – but came within a nail-biting single ball of one of the biggest upsets in T20 World Cup history in February, when they lost to England by only four runs. – AFP

## Cambodia begins UN process to resolve maritime dispute with Thailand

PHNOM PENH – Cambodia initiated a UN-backed dispute resolution process yesterday with neighbour Thailand over overlapping maritime claims in the Gulf of Thailand where undersea energy reserves are valued at around US\$300 billion.

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

The two sides agreed to a ceasefire deal in December after two rounds of deadly border clashes, but they have repeatedly accused each other of truce violations.

The move by Cambodia to begin the mediation process, taken under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), followed Thailand's cancellation last month of a 2001 bilateral agreement on overlapping maritime claims and energy exploration.

Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul said his government had revoked the memorandum of understanding, known as MoU 44, due to a long-standing stalemate in implementing it.

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet said on state-run TVK yesterday that his government had submitted a formal notice to Thailand and the UN secretary-

general to "begin compulsory conciliation proceedings" under UNCLOS.

"We have taken this step to protect Cambodia's sovereignty and maritime rights in accordance with international law," Hun Manet said.

"Both Cambodia and Thailand stand to gain from a fair and lasting settlement agreed with the guidance of the international expert conciliators."

Both countries are parties to the UN convention.

Thailand's foreign ministry did not immediately reply to a request for comment from AFP yesterday.

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

The neighbours' long-standing border dispute erupted into fighting in July and December, killing dozens of people and leaving several areas in border provinces claimed by both nations under Thai control.

Cambodia has repeatedly demanded the withdrawal of Thai forces from these areas and slammed Thailand over damage to several heritage temples sustained during the fighting. – AFP

# Israel, Hezbollah trade blows despite Trump declaring deal

Nader Durgham and Maria Danilova

BEIRUT – Israel continued to strike southern Lebanon yesterday as Iran-backed Hezbollah attacked its troops there despite an apparent Washington-brokered de-escalation deal and a fourth round of US-hosted talks between Lebanon and Israel.

US President Donald Trump had announced an agreement to halt some attacks on Monday, but neither side has publicly accepted it and Israel's defence minister said the Lebanese capital's southern suburbs remained potential targets.

The deal, according to a statement from the Lebanese embassy in Washington, would, at first, stop Israeli attacks on Beirut and Hezbollah attacks on Israeli territory.

Senior Hezbollah official Mahmud Qomati told AFP in a written statement the group "will not accept a partial ceasefire".

"The Zionist enemy should know that any aggression against the suburbs could lead to a deeper and stronger response" from the group, he added.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency (NNA) reported Israeli strikes, some of them deadly, on around 30 locations across the south yesterday.



This photo shows the aftermath of Israeli airstrikes in the Burj al-Chamali area near the southern city of Tyre yesterday. – AFP

Hezbollah meanwhile said it attacked Israeli troops in southern Lebanese lands they occupy, but has not claimed attacks in Israel.

The Israeli military said it intercepted two projectiles from Lebanon, without reporting any injuries.

Near Sidon, in the south, rescuers recovered the bodies of six members of the same family, including two children and a woman, following an Israeli strike.

Further south in the historic city of Tyre, the Jabal Amel hospital, severely damaged by an Israeli attack

nearby on Monday that wounded 39 staffers, resumed operations.

Lebanon's health ministry said yesterday that Israeli attacks had killed at least 3,468 people since March 2 – an increase of 35 compared to Monday.

At least 26 Israeli soldiers and one civilian contractor have been killed over the same time frame.

## 'Crazy'

Hezbollah drew Lebanon into the Middle East war on March 2 by firing rockets at Israel in retaliation

for the killing of Iran's supreme leader, and Tehran has insisted that Lebanon be included in any peace deal with Washington.

Recent days have seen a dramatic escalation in fighting and bombardment as Israeli troops staged their deepest ground offensive into Lebanon in two decades.

Citing what he called Hezbollah's "repeated violations" of a ceasefire officially in place since April 17 but never respected by either side, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had ordered strikes on Beirut's southern suburbs, a densely populated Hezbollah stronghold.

According to Axios, however, Trump called Netanyahu "f...g crazy" and accused him of putting peace talks with Iran at risk.

Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said Washington "endorsed this principle" that his country would hit the suburbs if Hezbollah continued firing at Israel.

"If Israeli towns continue to be attacked, we will evacuate and strike the Shiite Dahiyeh quarter in Beirut, Hezbollah's stronghold," Katz said.

In the southern suburbs, which many residents had fled the day before, many shops were closed yesterday, while a military drone

flew over the area at low altitude, according to an AFP journalist.

Resident Layla Shehab, 35, decided to return as "we found the situation has calmed down a bit".

## 'Consolidate the ceasefire'

According to Lebanese authorities, Hezbollah would no longer fire into Israel under the agreement revealed by Trump, while the Israeli military would spare Beirut's southern suburbs.

An adviser to Lebanese speaker of parliament Nabih Berri, a Hezbollah ally, told AFP that he would guarantee that the group would respect a "global ceasefire", if one were agreed.

Lebanese and Israeli delegations meanwhile began a new round of talks in Washington, the fourth between the two countries, who have no diplomatic relations, since the start of the war.

Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam said it was "necessary to consolidate the ceasefire" during the negotiations.

"Negotiations are the least costly choice for Lebanon," he reiterated.

Hezbollah is vehemently opposed to the talks, while Israel wants the group disarmed. – AFP

## Rubio says Mojtaba Khamenei alive and 'increasingly engaging'

WASHINGTON – US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said yesterday that Iran's supreme leader Mojtaba Khamenei, who was wounded in US-Israeli attacks and has not been seen in public since assuming office, is alive and increasingly active.

"I think there are indications out there that he is increasingly engaging at some level," Rubio told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Mojtaba Khamenei, 56, succeeded his father Ali Khamenei, who was killed in the first wave of US-Israeli strikes that launched the war on February 28.

Rubio was testifying in front of the Senate panel as talks on ending the three-month-old war that has engulfed the Middle East and triggered a global energy crisis have stalled.

Rubio expressed hope for a deal with Iran, while insisting that Tehran must severely limit its nuclear program

in order to see sanctions lifted.

"There is the prospect before us, which could happen today, it could happen tomorrow, it could happen next week," Rubio said.

Rubio said that Tehran must agree to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, a key shipping channel for Gulf oil and gas.

"They have to announce very clearly 'The straits are now open, we're not charging a toll.'" We will help remove the mines that they put in

there, and they will not fire on ships."

Additionally, he said: "They have to agree on negotiating severe and long-term limitations and/or cancellation of enrichment activity."

Rubio continued: "Iran is being sanctioned because they've highly enriched uranium, Iran is being sanctioned because of their nuclear activities, if they agree to give up those things, there will be sanctions relief." – AFP



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio testifies during a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing concerning the fiscal year 2027 budget for the State Department, on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, yesterday. Rubio testified publicly before Congress for the first time since the war in Iran began. – AFP

## UK sets target to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 87 pct by 2040

LONDON – The UK government yesterday set a legal target of cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 87 percent by 2040, an additional intermediate goal.

The country has already fixed an objective of reducing emissions by 68 percent by 2030 and at least 81 percent by 2035, compared to 1990 levels, and is aiming to be carbon neutral by the middle of the century.

The announcement comes as Energy Security and Net Zero Minister Ed Miliband said the UK faced "the

second fossil fuel shock of the decade", a reference to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 followed in February by the United States war with Iran.

The government would set out its plan for implementing the objective in coming months, in line with the Paris Agreement aim to keep global warming to 1.5C, a ministry statement added.

The landmark 2015 Paris Agreement commits the world to limiting warming to well below 2C and pursuing efforts to hold it at

1.5C – a long-term target scientists say would help avoid the worst consequences of climate change.

Mike Childs of environmental group Friends of the Earth welcomed the latest announcement.

"Extreme heat and record-breaking temperatures in May, more frequent and severe flooding, wildfires and drought – this is already the reality of the climate crisis in the UK," he said.

"Cutting carbon emissions is vital to help avert the worst impacts of climate change," he added. – AFP

## Oil dips, stocks advance with all eyes on Mideast war prospects

LONDON – Oil prices dipped and stocks advanced yesterday as investors weighed the chances for a peace agreement between the US and Iran and AI enthusiasm again boosting tech stocks.

After wavering at the open, Wall Street's main stock indices pushed higher during the morning session in New York.

Both the Dow and S&P 500 set fresh record highs.

Oil prices spiked higher on Monday on reports of stalled talks to end the Mideast war.

The concerns eased after US President Donald Trump insisted that the talks were moving rapidly and that Israel and Hezbollah had agreed to stop fighting – though Israeli strikes resumed yesterday.

"There is no concrete progress in Middle East negotiations... but investors appear broadly optimistic that a longer-term resolution will be reached," said Susannah Streeter, chief investment strategist at Wealth Club.

David Morrison at Trade Nation noted that despite the oil market turmoil, "prices remained near the bottom of their recent range" and well below the US\$100 a barrel seen a few weeks ago.

Even a surge in eurozone inflation in May to 3.2 percent, all but ensuring an interest rate hike later this month by the European Central Bank (ECB), was not enough to dent European stocks yesterday. – AFP

Underpinning market optimism was a new batch of headlines from US artificial intelligence (AI) giants.

Nvidia shares edged higher after jumping more than six percent on Monday after the chip colossus unveiled a powerful laptop chip for Windows machines.

That came as Google parent Alphabet announced plans to raise up to US\$80 billion in stock to fund a major expansion of its AI infrastructure, with Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway committing US\$10 billion.

And Anthropic, maker of the Claude chatbot, said it had filed confidentially for an initial public offering that could value the AI group at nearly one trillion US dollars.

The news propelled Seoul's stock market, which has been at the forefront of the AI rally this year and ended at another all-time high, with Samsung shares up more than three percent.

"Headlines around Iran grab the steering wheel but the AI trade remains the engine for stock markets," said Saxo Markets analyst Neil Wilson.

The outlook for US interest rates is also on the agenda, with the release of jobs data on Friday that could determine if the Federal Reserve will keep its benchmark rate stable or potentially hike borrowing costs to bolster the world's biggest economy. – AFP

## Mathematicians say 'don't believe hype' on AI capabilities

PARIS – Dozens of mathematicians signed a declaration yesterday calling for the discipline to resist beating the drum for artificial intelligence (AI) developers.

The "Leiden Declaration", backed by over 150 professors from across the world including Europe, Japan and the US, warned governments especially not to "believe the hype" about systems' maths abilities.

Their intervention follows claims of increasing capability from AI firms, including performance in elite international competitions and alleged solutions to thorny open questions in the field.

AI "opens new and exciting opportunities, but it also raises questions that cannot be left unexamined," International Mathematical Union (IMU) vice-president Ulrike Tillmann wrote in an endorsement.

"The future of mathematical research must be guided by human judgment, fair and transparent practices, and the shared values of the global mathematical community," she added.

AI developers face "a strong commercial incentive... to overstate the capabilities of their products," the declaration read.

Released "on market timelines" rather than at the pace of human-reviewed science, AI publicity can "misleadingly use specific mathematical tasks as metrics for the general reasoning capacities of commercial models", it added.

With hundreds of billions of US dollars in investor cash up for grabs, companies are scrambling to paint AI models in a glowing light.

"There is a competition to the death on the part of the main labs... they are trying, using mathematics... to attract investment so that each of them will be left standing," Columbia

University professor Michael Harris, one of the declaration's co-authors, told AFP.

In recent days, both SpaceX – the Elon Musk-owned rocket firm which includes subsidiary xAI – and Anthropic have advanced towards stock market listings, while industry standard-bearer OpenAI is believed to be close behind.

Just last week, OpenAI published to social media video in which UCLA professor Terence Tao, a past winner of the IMU's prestigious Fields Medal, vaunted its products' potential to support research.

Tao is "a very generous person, he gives an enormous amount to mathematics, but it's not healthy... to keep turning to the same person as if that person is the voice through which mathematics speaks," Harris said.

Beyond the risk of maths being enlisted for commercial gain, the declaration authors said AI systems could produce plausible-seeming but incorrect proofs that are hard for humans to verify, or undermine attribution and credit to researchers on whose work it builds.

They fear increased use of AI in maths could incentivise bandwagon-chasing research that takes advantage of the new tools at the expense of other problems, short-circuit peer review systems and put researchers at the service of AI developers, rather than self-directed free inquiry as in universities.

AI also has potential harms in the shape of "warfare, mass surveillance, political disruption and environmental damage," the authors wrote.

They urged individual mathematicians to "evaluate the ethical consequences of your research, and if necessary withdraw from harmful work". – AFP

## Trump signs AI order giving govt access to powerful models

WASHINGTON, DC – US President Donald Trump signed an executive order yesterday creating a voluntary framework under which AI developers will share advanced models with the government before public release.

The central provision allows companies such as OpenAI, Google or Anthropic to give the government access to their most powerful models for up to 30 days before planned release.

The order was triggered by concerns over Anthropic's Myths model, which the AI startup has refused to release publicly due to its ability to expose vulnerabilities in computer systems – including those of banks, governments and hospitals.

The 30-day window represents a compromise: the original draft that leaked to US media called for up to 90 days of pre-release government access, while tech companies had pushed to

cut that figure to just 14 days.

The signing came after a turbulent few weeks in which the White House appeared close to unveiling the measure, only to pull back abruptly.

According to *Politico* and other media, David Sacks, the Silicon Valley venture capitalist who served as Trump's AI and crypto czar, called the president to warn that the measure would slow innovation and hurt the United States in its AI race with China – blindsiding White House staff who believed Sacks supported the order.

Sacks wrote on X last week that "unnecessary regulation is the biggest threat to innovation in America," adding that winning the AI race required clearing "bureaucratic hurdles" from state legislatures and Washington politicians.

The order also instructs Treasury, the National Security Agency and the CISA agency to form an

"AI cybersecurity clearinghouse" in voluntary collaboration with industry and critical infrastructure operators to coordinate scanning for software vulnerabilities and prioritize patches.

Trump scrapped a Biden-era AI oversight order on his first day back in the White House.

Biden's 2023 order required AI companies to share safety test results with the government and leaned heavily on voluntary commitments – already a light-touch approach that fell short of what many experts had called for.

By contrast, the European Union's AI Act – which entered into force in 2024 – sets binding rules for high-risk AI systems, including mandatory transparency requirements and, for the most powerful models, obligations around safety testing and incident reporting. – AFP

## 2 killed in Kenya protests over US Ebola centre: rights group



Demonstrators chant slogans as they carry placards and a mock coffin during a protest against a US-built Ebola quarantine centre planned to begin operations at Kenya's Laikipia Air Base, in Nairobi yesterday. – AFP

NAIROBI – Two people died during protests over a contested Ebola quarantine centre for US nationals in Kenya, a rights group said yesterday, as President William Ruto defended the planned centre.

The US-built facility at Kenya's Laikipia Air Base was due to open last week, according to US officials, to quarantine Americans arriving from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which is battling a major Ebola outbreak.

The centre – about 200 kilometres from the capital Nairobi – was set to have 50 isolation beds and be managed by US medical staff.

Washington plans to commit US\$13.5 million towards Kenya's Ebola preparedness efforts, the US State Department said last week.

The plan sparked anger at the United States using Kenyan soil and bringing Ebola patients to the country.

Images in local media showed violent protests breaking out near the facility on Monday. Police fired tear gas to disperse protesters.

Hussein Khalid of rights group

VOCAL Africa said in an X post that a 27-year-old man was "shot and killed" during the protests and "died on the spot".

He told AFP a second person was also confirmed dead, but was still being identified.

Police told AFP they could not confirm the deaths.

### Court halts plan

In a post on X on Tuesday, Ruto said the proposed US facility was "neither unique nor exceptional but part of a broader national preparedness system", adding that it "will be there to serve the people of Kenya and to serve our friends, including the Americans".

"We are a responsible government. We know what we are doing. So people should relax," Ruto said earlier.

Kenya has recorded no cases of Ebola despite widespread testing of arrivals but neighbouring Uganda has registered 15 cases including one death.

The Kenyan High Court extended a temporary halt to the US

facility yesterday, according to the rights group Katiba Institute, which filed a petition against the centre.

The court said the government had seven days to "disclose all agreements" relating to the facility.

A small group of protesters gathered in central Nairobi on Tuesday, wearing white protective gear and carrying a coffin emblazoned with "Ebola" and placards reading: "Reject Ebola in Kenya."

Some 321 Ebola cases have now been confirmed in the DRC, including 48 deaths, since the outbreak was declared on May 15, the World Health Organisation (WHO) said yesterday.

One US citizen, a medical missionary working in the DRC, has contracted Ebola so far. He was evacuated and is receiving treatment in Germany.

The plan also sparked criticism in the United States.

"The Trump admin should bring Americans home and help them, not outsource that responsibility to a foreign government," the Democrats' House Foreign Affairs Committee said on X. – AFP

## Lithuania waters down reform of public broadcaster after protests

VILNIUS – Lithuania's parliament yesterday approved a softened reform of the country's public broadcaster, LRT, after initial overhaul plans drew massive protests, accusations of a "political takeover" and international criticism.

Despite the changes, media watchdogs still warn that the broadcaster's independence could be at risk.

The dispute began in late 2025, pitting the government and some politicians against journalists, NGOs and international organisations.

At issue were plans to change LRT's governance. Earlier proposals included making it easier to dismiss the broadcaster's director and freezing public funding. Critics said this could weaken editorial independence.

The reforms sparked large demonstrations from December to April, gathering between 10,000 and

30,000 people each time, according to police and media estimates.

More than 143,000 people also signed a petition against what they called a "political takeover". International bodies, including the Council of Europe, raised concerns about political influence over the broadcaster.

Parliament speaker Juozas Olekas said the revised law would improve how public funds are used. The ruling Social Democrat-led coalition said changes at LRT were needed after a financial audit.

Media groups welcomed the removal of some earlier measures. However, they say key concerns remain, including a supervisory board seen as politicised and rules that could still ease the dismissal of the public broadcaster's director-general.

LRT employs more than 600 staff, including around 200 journalists. – AFP

# Cuba rejects US ‘slander’ over sanctioned army business group

HAVANA – Cuba yesterday denounced American “slander” against its military-backed conglomerate GAESA, which dominates the island’s economy and was the recent target of new US sanctions.

The fresh restrictions on GAESA were announced in early May as part of Washington’s mounting pressure campaign against the communist-ruled island, which US President Donald Trump has openly mused about taking over.

In announcing the sanctions, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio accused GAESA, which is estimated to control 70 percent of the Cuban economy, of enriching the elites at the expense of ordinary citizens.

“A ‘state within the state’ that is accountable to no one and hoards the profits from its businesses for the benefit of a small elite,” Rubio said.

Havana pushed back in a statement yesterday, arguing that the group “is neither an opaque structure nor a parallel one to the Cuban state.”

“On the contrary, it has been a coordinated response of proven efficiency to the economic siege that has historically sought to suffocate the Cuban Revolution,” it said, referring to the US embargo imposed on the island in 1962.



Photo taken on Monday of the headquarters of Cuba's Grupo de Administración Empresarial S.A. (GAESA – Business Administration Group Ltd) in Havana. – AFP

The latest wave of US sanctions doubled down on GAESA by freezing its assets in the United States and penalising foreign companies that work with it.

Havana called the measures “the most intense, disproportionate, and dangerous escalation in the recent history of relations between Cuba and the United States.”

It said GAESA’s “countless” services included sustaining the economy during the COVID-19 pandemic and building more than 10,000 homes.

Its work “speaks for itself, and it does so above the state slander

concocted in Washington,” the statement added.

Canadian mining firm Sherritt, following sanctions over its Cuba operations, recently pulled the plug on its partnership with GAESA.

A *Miami Herald* investigation based on purported leaked documents estimated that the military conglomerate had US\$18 billion in assets in early 2024, in line with the level of expenditure by the state itself.

A US energy blockade imposed on Cuba in January has worsened living conditions on the island and deepened a pre-existing economic crisis. – AFP

# Ecuador clamps down on lucrative illegal gold mines

Santiago Piedra Silva

LA MERCED DE BUENOS AIRES, Ecuador – “Bomb incoming!” A military radio intercepts a voice alerting miners about an attack, while dozens of soldiers advance over Ecuador’s Andean mountains where illegal gold extraction runs rampant.

The explosion detonates in a gorge hours later, while a separate blast elsewhere sends chunks of metal flying.

The resounding booms signal the Ecuadoran army’s attempt to crush illegal mining operations, which are run by criminal groups in the northern La Merced de Buenos Aires region near the Colombian border.

AFP witnessed these attempts in action while accompanying an operation into the rugged terrain, where soldiers covering their faces “for security” patrol on foot, sporting rifles, helmets and bulletproof vests.

The army has gone as far as using tanks, BM-21 rocket launchers and mortars to attack illegal mines in several areas.

The mountainous region “has great wealth that has not been tapped,” said operation leader Colonel Christian Ruales.

In 2019, security forces evicted around 3,000 miners from the mountains in what was one of Ecuador’s largest operations against illegal mining.

According to Ruales, the presence of soldiers is essential to curb the practice.

“Otherwise, this would flare up again,” he said, warning of further illicit projects emerging.

“They’re coming to blow it up,” the voice crackles through the radio again, warning that the “greens” – the soldiers – are approaching.

Despite the constant military presence, gold extraction is going full steam ahead, with the precious metal’s value reaching a record of almost US\$5,600 per ounce in January.

The illegal trade yields even higher profits than drug trafficking in some Latin American countries, according to the Ecuadoran Chamber of Mining. And in Ecuador alone, between 60 percent and 70 percent of gold mined is illegal, generating more than US\$1.6 billion annually.

“I see raids, but mining doesn’t stop,” Brian Proano, a food vendor and former illegal miner told AFP.

“Mining is going to continue because there’s no work out here,” he added.

## Power struggle

The activity spells both environmental and social problems in La Merced de Buenos Aires.

AFP saw traces of chemicals like cyanide discarded by a clandestine gold refinement facility on a riverbank, exuding a thick liquid and a strong, vinegar-like odour.

The Oliver Sinisterra Front – a dissident group of Colombia’s now-defunct rebel army FARC – is active in the region.

Local gold exploitation sparked a power struggle between the front and the Ecuadoran gang Los Lobos (“The Wolves”).

Tied to Mexico’s Jalisco New Generation Cartel and boasting thousands of members across the country, Los Lobos is one of Ecuador’s “most powerful and innovative criminal organisations,” according to non-governmental group Insight Crime.

The gang engages in illegal mining and has even co-opted some legal operations, the NGO says.

With US backing, right-wing President Daniel Noboa’s government is attempting to crack down on crime groups.

With little effect, however. Homicides in Ecuador have increased, ticking up to over 9,200 violent deaths last year – a record high. – AFP

# Spanish court drops charge against PM’s brother in graft case

MADRID – A Spanish court on Monday dropped one of the charges against the brother of Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez in an influence-peddling trial, ruling the alleged offence had expired under the statute of limitations.

David Sánchez, a composer and orchestra conductor who trained and worked in Toulouse, Tokyo and Madrid, is accused of benefiting from the creation of a tailor-made position as coordinator of music conservatories in the southwestern province of Badajoz.

The role was later transformed into head of the province’s performing arts office.

He and 10 other defendants went on trial last Thursday on

charges including alleged abuse of office and influence peddling. All deny the allegations.

The judge hearing the case said on Monday he had agreed with a defence request to dismiss the charge that Dávid Sanchez accepted an illegal appointment in 2017, after finding the legal time limit for prosecution had run out.

The court said the offence carried only a minor penalty.

Prosecutors say the position was created in 2016, before Pedro Sánchez became prime minister in 2018. David Sánchez remained in the post until at least early 2025.

The job was under the authority of the provincial council of Badajoz, which at the time was governed by

Pedro Sanchez’s Spanis Socialist Workers’ Party (PSOE)

The case adds to a growing list of corruption-related proceedings involving figures in Pedro Sánchez’s political orbit, increasing pressure on his minority coalition government.

His wife, Begoña Gómez, is under investigation in a separate corruption case.

His former right-hand man, ex-transport minister José Luis Ábalos, is awaiting a verdict in his own corruption trial, which concluded in May.

Last month, a court placed former Socialist prime minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, a Sánchez ally, under formal investigation for influence peddling and other alleged crimes. – AFP



A Ecuadorean soldier wearing a facemask takes part in an operation against illegal mining in Buenos Aires, Imbabura province, Ecuador, last Wednesday. – AFP

# Chilean president renews crime crackdown pledge

VALPARAÍSO – Chile’s rightwing president José Antonio Kast on Monday announced crackdowns on crime and migration as his ratings suffer due to dissatisfaction with his security policy less than three months into his term.

Kast unveiled new measures including a “vandal” registry and longer detentions for migrants during his first-ever address to Congress as Chilean president.

The 60-year-old took office in March as Chile’s most right-wing

leader since the end of General Augusto Pinochet’s 1973-1990 dictatorship.

He promised to get tough on crime and curb irregular migration, but a perceived lack of action during his first months in office has dented his popularity.

Speaking to Congress in Valparaiso, some 120 kilometres from Santiago, Kast announced police deployments in 50 neighbourhoods to combat organized crime in the coming weeks.

He also unveiled the creation of a registry of “vandals” who

attack police, health officials or monuments, with those listed losing benefits such as free university education or a state pension.

“We have to crack down on organised crime and drastically increase the penalties associated with criminal activity,” he said.

The televised speech promised economic revival and the creation of jobs, and renewed Kast’s pledge to expel some 340,000 undocumented people from Chile.

He announced stronger migration

controls, increased expulsions and extended detention periods for undocumented people – currently up to five days.

The plan will encourage “the voluntary departure of illegal immigrants who are in Chile,” he said, without providing details.

Although Chile is one of Latin America’s safest countries, the government has attributed a spike in murders and kidnappings over the last decade to foreign criminal gangs such as Venezuela’s Tren de Aragua.

Several kilometres away from Congress, police on Monday clashed with around 100 protesters denouncing governmental budget cuts.

Kast’s approval ratings began plunging soon after his inauguration, which analysts have linked to what voters see as his government’s lack of a credible security plan.

In May, he fired his security minister and secretary general of the government, who acts as government spokesperson, both of whom had been criticised for poor performance. – AFP

## Football shorts

### Bologna announce Tedesco as new coach, replacing Italiano

ROME – Serie A side Bologna announced yesterday Domenico Tedesco would take over as coach to replace Vincenzo Italiano, who left last week.

Italiano is one of the favourites to replace Antonio Conte as Napoli coach.

“Bologna announces that it has appointed Domenico Tedesco as first team technical director,” the club said in a statement, adding the coach had signed a two-year contract with an option for a further year.

The 40-year-old, who holds joint Italian and German citizenship, recently left Turks Fenerbahce, where he replaced Jose Mourinho, after less than one season.

He previously coached Schalke 04, Spartak Moscow and RB Leipzig, with whom he won the German Cup in 2022.

He also spent two years at the helm of the Belgian national team.

Born in Italy, Tedesco – whose name means German in Italian – was brought up in Germany from the age of two.

He is set to be part of a summer coaching merry-go-round in Italy where Bologna, Napoli, AC Milan and Lazio will all hire a new boss, with Atalanta and Fiorentina potentially doing likewise. –AFP

### Villarreal appoint Inigo Perez after Rayo success

M A D R I D – Spanish club Villarreal announced on Monday the appointment of Inigo Perez as coach on a three-year contract, following the departure of Marcelino Garcia Toral.

“Villarreal CF have reached an agreement with Inigo Perez, who will be the first-team manager for the next three seasons, until June 2029,” the La Liga club said in a statement.

Perez takes charge after Marcelino failed to reach agreement on a contract renewal after leading the club to third place in La Liga and Champions League football next season. –AFP

Perez arrives after two-and-a-half-years at the helm of the Madrid-based Rayo Vallecano who finished eighth in La Liga this season.

The 38-year-old led Rayo to the Conference League final which they lost last week to Crystal Palace.

Villarreal will be the second team managed by Perez, a former Athletic Bilbao midfielder, who began his head coaching career with Rayo Vallecano.

Perez had arrived at Rayo as Andoni Iraola’s assistant, but was unable to follow him to England due to bureaucratic issues when Iraola moved to Bournemouth in 2023.

However, in February 2024, Rayo brought him back as head coach until his departure for Villarreal. –AFP

### Norwegian football federation ask FIFA to probe Trump peace prize

OSLO – The Norwegian Football Federation (NFF) said yesterday it had asked FIFA’s ethics committee to look into the world football governing body’s award of a peace prize to US President Donald Trump.

FIFA president Gianni Infantino awarded Trump its inaugural peace prize during the December 6 draw for the 2026 World Cup.

Later that month, human rights group FairSqaure filed a complaint to FIFA’s ethics committee, claiming that Infantino had breached his duty of neutrality by supporting Trump.

FIFA has never revealed how it attributed the peace award, which came at a time when Trump and his administration repeatedly pushed for him to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

NFF president Lise Klaveness said they had acted alone in their approach to FIFA’s ethics committee.

“I think others (federations) knew that they could sign it if they wanted to.

“We concluded that it was useless to put pressure on anyone, it would just create friction.”

Infantino has openly courted close ties with Trump in the lead up to the June 11-July 19 World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico. –AFP

## Ancelotti relaxed about Neymar’s World Cup availability



NEWARK, USA – Brazil coach Carlo Ancelotti is in no hurry to rush star forward Neymar back from his calf injury, the Italian said yesterday as his team touched down in the United States ahead of the World Cup.

Ancelotti has previously said Neymar would be fit for the Seleção’s “first or second” group stage match at the global extravaganza in the US, Canada and Mexico.

Last week, Brazil’s team doctor Rodrigo Lasmar revealed Neymar, 34, had suffered a calf injury and would be out for up to three weeks.

Five-time winners Brazil begin their World Cup campaign against Morocco on June 13.

“He’s progressing well, he’s doing well, we’re in no rush,” Ancelotti said after Brazil arrived in Newark.

Neymar’s inclusion in Ancelotti’s 26-man squad was something of a surprise given he had not played for his country for almost three years and has been injury-plagued in recent seasons.

He is Brazil’s all-time leading goalscorer with 79 goals in 128 appearances for the Seleção. This will be his fourth World Cup.

Brazil arrive at the World Cup



Brazil’s forward Neymar gives a thumbs up as team Brazil arrives at Newark Liberty International Airport (EWR) in Newark, New Jersey yesterday ahead of the FIFA World Cup. –AFP

much less feared than in most previous editions.

The team finished fifth in South American qualifying and have lost to France, Japan and Bolivia in the last year.

But Ancelotti insisted his team will be a force to be reckoned with in North America.

“We want to compete with opponents, try to do our best, work hard - everyone knows what Brazil’s expectations are,” he said.

“Everyone knows that there

are no favourites, there are some strong teams and I think Brazil can compete with anyone.”

Brazil may not carry the kind of aura of past teams, but veteran midfielder Casemiro said people back home will be expecting nothing less than a sixth world crown.

“There are big expectations, it will be tough, but we are very excited, we want to win,” he said.

Brazil are in Group C and will play Haiti and Scotland after Morocco. –AFP

## Bielsa says Suarez ‘owes no apology’ after World Cup omission



MONTEVIDEO – Liverpool striker, Darwin Nunez. Uruguay coach Marcelo Bielsa said on Monday that Luis Suarez does not owe him an apology after he opted against a World Cup recall for the 39-year-old striker.

The Inter Miami forward, Uruguay’s all-time leading scorer, retired from international football in September 2024, but recently indicated he would be willing to return if selected.

Bielsa explained that Suarez’s absence from the 26-man World Cup squad he named on Sunday was due to his preference for other attacking options, including another former

Liverpool striker, Darwin Nunez.

“Suarez said he was willing to contribute with a return to the national team, which I always understood as a valuable and sincere statement. In fact, I have no differences with Suarez,” Bielsa said at his final press conference in Uruguay before departing for the World Cup.

“Luis Suarez does not owe me an apology,” the Argentine added when pressed on their relationship.

Bielsa said his decision to choose other players was “guided solely by what I consider best for the team’s chances”.

Suarez caused a stir shortly after his international retirement by

criticising Bielsa and accusing him of mistreating the squad during the 2024 Copa America.

Amid those tensions, Uruguay endured a run of poor results, including a heavy 5-1 defeat in a friendly against the United States in November.

Despite the turbulence, Bielsa kept his job and will lead Uruguay at his third World Cup, having previously coached Argentina in 2002 and Chile in 2010.

Uruguay begin their World Cup campaign on June 15 against Saudi Arabia in Group H, which also includes Spain and debutants Cape Verde. –AFP

## Iran World Cup squad to head for Mexico via Spain



TEHRAN – Iran’s football team will leave for Spain this weekend en route to their World Cup base in Mexico despite still awaiting visas, the head of the country’s football federation said.

The 2026 World Cup is being hosted jointly by the United States, Mexico and Canada.

Neither the United States, where Iran will play their three group stage matches, nor Mexico, where the team will be based throughout the tournament, have yet issued visas for the players.

“We will leave for Spain on Saturday, and from there the team will go directly to Tijuana in Mexico,” football federation chief Mehdi Taj said on Monday on a

sports programme broadcast on state television.

“We will obtain a Mexican visa tomorrow (yesterday) or the day after, and then a US visa will be issued quickly,” Taj said.

Iran have been drawn in Group G and will play New Zealand and Belgium in Los Angeles on June 15 and 21, followed by a game against Egypt in Seattle on June 26.

Taj said that the outbreak of the Middle East war on February 28, when the United States and Israel attacked Iran, “changed everything” for Team Melli.

“The situation in the country, and especially the war, has upended all our plans,” Taj said.

“We had arranged good warm-up matches, including one against Spain,

which was cancelled” in February.

The Iranians relocated their World Cup base, which initially was planned to be in Tucson in the US state of Arizona, to the northwestern Mexican border city of Tijuana due to tensions over the Middle East war.

Iran are currently preparing for the tournament in Turkey.

On Friday they beat Gambia 3-1 in a friendly in Antalya, where they will play another warm-up match against Mali tomorrow.

Taj complained that the team’s World Cup preparations had been also dogged by “financial difficulties” because of the economic crisis in the country and the sharp depreciation of the rial against the dollar. –AFP



Croatia’s midfielder Luka Modric (left) and Croatia’s defender Luka Vuskovic take part in a training session ahead of the international friendly against Belgium ahead of the 2026 FIFA World Cup football tournament at the Rujevica Stadium in Rijeka, Croatia yesterday. –AFP

## Joshua says 'only success' matters as Fury fight looms



Albania's Kristian Prenga (right) and Britain's Anthony Joshua pose at a press conference in London on Monday, ahead of their boxing match in Saudi Arabia in July. — AFP

### Boxing

LONDON — Anthony Joshua said Monday he would not celebrate that a deal has finally been struck for a heavyweight clash with rival Tyson Fury until after he won.

"I'm not pleased because the pleasure really comes after victory," said Joshua. "Signing a contract doesn't mean anything. Winning is the only true success."

The pair are heading for a long-awaited 'Battle of Britain', probably in November, but before both boxers are eyeing a warm-up fight.

Joshua will face unheralded Albanian Kristian Prenga in Saudi Arabia on July 25 in his first bout since being involved in a car crash in Nigeria last December which killed two of his close friends.

Fury last week posted a video in an Instagram story showing

him back in training in Thailand alongside the caption: "Let's go August 1, Dublin, Ireland."

Fury, 37, could take a place on a card being put together by veteran promoter Frank Warren in the Irish capital on that date.

No opponent has yet been named, although Warren has ruled out Fury fighting Andy Ruiz Jr, who dethroned Joshua as world champion in 2019 before losing the rematch later that year.

On Monday, Joshua insisted it was time to get back to work as he prepares to take on little-known Prenga.

The fight was originally scheduled to take place in Riyadh, but at their head-to-head press conference it was revealed it has been moved to Jeddah - Saudi Arabia's second largest city.

The 36-year-old Joshua has not fought a meaningful opponent

since being knocked out by Daniel Dubois in September 2024.

"What does boxing give me? It gives me an opportunity to work. I'm a contractor, this is a contract, this is my job so I've got an opportunity to work," Joshua said.

"You have to put a road map in front of a fighter and show them what is point one, point two, point three. It gives purpose and focus. I know what my year looks like.

"Give me the opportunity to fight Prenga, give me the opportunity to fight Fury, give me the opportunity to fight for the championship.

"It ain't about looking past anyone, it's just knowing your purpose and knowing your steps forward and moving up the ladder.

"I've got a clear goal, I know what this year is about, I know how tough this year is going to be. I've been training hard, that's my life."

— AFP

## Sabalenka defeats Osaka, Italian players shine in men's singles at French Open



PARIS — Top seed Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus defeated Japan's Naomi Osaka to reach the women's singles quarterfinals at the French Open on Monday, while three Italians advanced to the men's singles last eight.

Sabalenka, a four-time Grand Slam champion, moved closer to a first Roland Garros title with a 7-5, 6-3 fourth-round win over Osaka. The world No. 1 is the only top-six women's seed left in the draw.

"I'm not really overthinking. Anything can happen. That's tennis. That's sport," said Sabalenka. "I'm just trying once again to be focused on myself and make sure that when I'm there competing, I'm bringing my best level that I have. I'm fighting and doing everything I can to get this trophy."

Sabalenka will next face Russia's Diana Shnaider, who upset American Madison Keys 6-3, 3-6, 6-0.

In men's singles action, Flavio Cobolli, Matteo Berrettini and Matteo Arnaldi all won their fourth-round matches.

No. 10 seed Cobolli defeated American Zachary Svajda 6-2, 6-3, 6-7 (3), 7-6 (5), while Berrettini beat Argentina's Juan Manuel Cerundolo 6-3, 7-6 (2), 7-6 (6). Arnaldi outlasted American Frances Tiafoe 7-6 (5), 6-7 (5), 3-6, 7-6 (3), 6-4.

"I was starting to be a little bit nervous, also with my team. Sometimes you have to pass this moment to have more chance to be better on the next one. So, I think I just played my tennis without thought, and at the end, it works," Cobolli said.

Berrettini, a former Wimbledon finalist, continued his comeback at Roland Garros.

"After all the setbacks, all the injuries, all the bad moments, I came back once again," he said.

"There were moments where it was really tough to come back and play, because I wasn't ready, and I wasn't sure about my confidence. Now I feel great."

Arnaldi called his win over Tiafoe the best match he had played.

"I don't know how I'm standing here, to be honest," Arnaldi said. "I think at one point it wasn't tennis, it was just something else, you just played with everything you had. There had to be a winner, and fortunately it was me tonight."

Cobolli will face fourth-seeded Felix Auger-Aliassime of Canada in the quarterfinals, while Berrettini and Arnaldi will meet in an all-Italian clash.

Also Monday, China's Guo Hanyu and France's Kristina Mladenovic beat the third-seeded pair of Zhang Shuai of China and Elise Mertens of Belgium 6-2, 6-4 to reach the women's doubles quarterfinals.

— Xinhua

## Kostyuk wins all-Ukraine duel to reach French Open semis



PARIS — Marta Kostyuk beat compatriot Elina Svitolina yesterday to reach her maiden Grand Slam semi-final and become the first Ukrainian woman to reach the last four at Roland Garros in the professional era.

Kostyuk, the 15<sup>th</sup> seed, overcame Svitolina 6-3, 2-6, 6-2, and will take on Russian teenager Mirra Andreeva tomorrow for a place in the final.

Her showdown with Andreeva will be a rematch of last month's Madrid Open final, which Kostyuk won in straight sets.

"I will be watching the match and definitely cheering for her

hopefully that she can get the title," said Svitolina.

"I think it's going to be massive for Ukraine."

Andreeva is set to compete in her second French Open semi-final, two years after her breakthrough run.

She was asked about the challenges of taking on a Ukrainian opponent during wartime.

"For me it doesn't matter who I play. I really try to play against the ball that is coming at me," said Andreeva.

"Usually, it doesn't matter to me who I'm playing against, so I'm trying to really focus on the game and on the game plan that I have to use on the court." — AFP



Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk reacts to her victory at the end of her quarter final singles match against Ukraine's Elina at the French Open tennis tournament on Court Philippe-Chatrier at the Roland-Garros Complex in Paris yesterday. — AFP

## Zverev brushes off Jodar to reach French Open semis



PARIS — Alexander Zverev laid down a marker at the French Open on Tuesday with a straight-sets victory over rising Spanish star Rafael Jodar to book his spot in the semi-finals.

With the crushing 7-6 (7/3), 6-1, 6-3 win over the 19-year-old, Zverev advanced to his fifth Roland Garros semi-final in the last six years.

The second seed is considered the heavy favourite to win his first Grand Slam title, following the shock early departures of top seed Jannik Sinner and 24-time major champion Novak Djokovic last week in Paris.

Zverev has finished runner-up three times in Grand Slam finals, including at Roland Garros two years ago, and knows the pressure is firmly on him in the French capital as he bids to shake off his unwanted title of tennis' nearly-man.

"I want to win the matches that are ahead of me, that is my goal, that is my aim," said Zverev, who has only dropped one set en route to the last four.

"I just want to keep going, but yeah, we'll see."

Zverev will face either 19-year-

old Joao Fonseca or 20-year-old Jakub Mensik on Friday for a spot in the final.

Jodar got in front in the opener as he broke the tentative German in the sixth game, overpowering his opponent in a brutal baseline exchange on break point.

But Zverev then stepped onto the front foot two games later to wipe out the break to love as Jodar was serving for the set, before confidently navigating his way through a tie-break.

The former world number two kept up the pressure in the second set and produced a double break of serve to take himself to the edge of an 11<sup>th</sup> Grand Slam semi-final appearance.

The match then looked up for 27<sup>th</sup> seed Jodar, who had battled through back-to-back five-setters to reach the quarter-finals, when Zverev broke him in the very first game of the third set.

The Spaniard found himself serving to keep his maiden French Open campaign alive but Zverev ground out a first match point and converted it with a bullet forehand winner from out wide.

— AFP

# Hollywood honours Marilyn Monroe, 100 years on

Paula Ramon

LOS ANGELES – Hollywood wished a breathy “Happy Birthday” to Marilyn Monroe on Monday as Tinseltown celebrated 100 years since the birth of one of its most famous daughters.

More than six decades after her tragically early death, the city was awash with references to the bottle-blonde icon on what would have been her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday.

“When you think of Hollywood, you think of Marilyn,” tour guide Lacey Noel told AFP on Hollywood Boulevard’s Walk of Fame.

“There’s some sort of beautiful, mysterious, and captivating aura that she has that will never go away.”

At the historic Chinese Theatre, where Monroe’s handprints are immortalised alongside “Gentlemen Prefer Blondes” (1953) co-star Jane Russell, fans gathered to sing “Happy Birthday” – echoing her famed sultry serenade to president John F. Kennedy.

One hundred roses and a cake were placed at the site, a symbol of Hollywood’s golden age and a popular tourist hotspot.

Tributes began on Sunday, with the Academy Museum opening “Marilyn Monroe: Hollywood Icon,” an exhibit celebrating her film career and life cut short.

The Academy Museum will host special screenings of her prolific filmography throughout the month, including “The Asphalt Jungle” (1950), “Niagara” (1953), “The Seven Year Itch” (1955), “Some Like It Hot” (1959), and “The Misfits” (1961).

The exhibit, which runs until February 2027, includes hundreds of original pieces,

some rarely on display – such as Monroe’s famed pink dress worn during her iconic performance of “Diamonds Are a Girl’s Best Friend” in “Gentlemen Prefer Blondes.”

Tomorrow, Julien’s Auctions will put nearly 200 pieces of Monroe memorabilia under the hammer as part of its special “100 Years of Marilyn” sale.

The items include unpublished photographs, a script with notes from her final production, the unfinished short film “Something’s Got to Give,” and personal items such as handwritten recipes and her Elizabeth Arden lipstick.

## Image maker

Born in Los Angeles on June 1, 1926, Monroe had an unstable childhood spent between orphanages and foster homes. She married for the first time at age 16.

She had her first brush with show business in 1944, while working in a factory, when a photographer arrived to capture photos of women working on production lines during World War II.

Launching into the world of modelling soon after, she divorced her husband and made a history-defining decision: dyeing her brown hair platinum blonde.

She landed her first contract with Fox, and by the age of 30 had established herself as a global star.

Behind the scenes, Monroe founded her own production company, attended the prestigious Actors Studio in New York, and even defied the studios.

In the 1950s, while under contract with 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, she refused to act in the



Flowers are placed at Marilyn Monroe’s crypt in the Corridor of Memories mausoleum at Pierce Brothers Westwood Village Memorial Park & Mortuary in Los Angeles on Monday, in commemoration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her birth. – AFP

adaptation of the musical “The Girl in Pink Tights,” deeming the script mediocre and her salary – three times less than that of co-star Frank Sinatra – unfair.

Her collaboration with Fox gave the world some of the most famous images of all time, including Monroe seemingly trying to keep control of a white dress as she stood on a New York City subway vent for “The Seven Year Itch.”

Aside from her cinematic performances, Monroe’s fame was driven by a private life that provided endless fodder for scandal rags, feeding a public obsession and making

her the archetypal 20<sup>th</sup> Century celebrity.

After her first marriage at the age of 16 there was a brief and tumultuous union with baseball legend Joe DiMaggio, followed by a five-year marriage to acclaimed US playwright Arthur Miller.

But there were also suggestions that she became involved with both John F. Kennedy and with his brother Robert F. Kennedy, as well as with Hollywood figures like Marlon Brando and Frank Sinatra.

Monroe died from a drug overdose in her Los Angeles home in August 1962. She was just 36 years old. – AFP

# Indie horror flicks ‘Obsession’ and ‘Backrooms’ draw Gen Z to cinema

Paula Ramon

LOS ANGELES – MThe multi-million-US-dollar openings of indie horror flicks “Obsession” and “Backrooms” have Hollywood buzzing about the 20-something YouTuber directors who are driving Generation Z audiences to the cinemas in droves.

The endless yellow hallways of A24’s “Backrooms,” directed by 20-year-old Kane Parsons, terrified tens of thousands of people in its opening weekend to rack up US\$118 million at the box office.

And Focus Features film “Obsession,” directed by 26-year-old Curry Barker, has taken in US\$148 million worldwide in two weeks – a smash hit for a production that cost US\$750,000.

“It’s a huge, huge success and a real turning point for the industry, potentially,” said associate editor Matthew Frank of The Ankler, a digital media company that covers Hollywood.

“They’re breaking out with these films that are appealing to a younger demographic,” Frank said, adding that the vast majority of ticket buyers the past couple weekends “have been under 35 and even, you know, under 25. So it’s appealing to this demographic [that] normally doesn’t really get spoken to.”

In recent years multiplexes have faced a multi-fold decline, fuelled by the rise of streaming, a lag in recovery in ticket sales since COVID-19, and the strikes that halted production in Hollywood in 2023.

But this year’s numbers are drumming up optimism for the best year since the pandemic.

This is thanks in part to Generation Z, which boosted the box office by 25 percent last year, according to a report from the National Research Group.

Cinema owners are “ecstatic about these weekends,” said Ronnie Yount, owner of the Phoenix Theaters chain in the midwest.

Yount compared both films to “Lilo & Stitch” for driving box office – which seemed unthinkable.

## Franchise fails

The trick to tapping into the younger market is to “deliver the right films,” Frank said.

“Hollywood’s problem, for a while, was saying, ‘oh, it’s young people,’ when in fact it was because they were making the 10<sup>th</sup> [instalment in] pre-existing franchises that were popular for their parents.”

The safe bets from studios that hoped to cash in on an endless slate of summer action hero movies turned off younger audiences.

“When you make something that’s for that audience, that’s when they’ll come out,” Frank said.

Parsons, who is known to his 3.2 million subscribers as Kane Pixels on YouTube, has racked up more than 300 million views.

The inspiration for “Backrooms” came from a photo posted to an internet forum in 2019 showing, without context, a yellow space.

Parsons, then a teenager, told AFP that he saw the image as a “vaguely nostalgic and vaguely dreamlike but also very tangible science-fiction concept.”

His YouTube video of a young man lost in terrifying corridors amassed millions of views in a matter of days, and led to a contract with A24.

His endless nightmare is now on the big screen, starring Oscar-nominated actors Chiwetel Ejiofor and Renate Reinsve.

Barker went from an audience of 1.1 million subscribers on his channel “That’s a Bad Idea” to premiering “Obsession” at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2025.

The movie follows the horrifying consequences after a young man’s wish comes true, and the target

of his romantic attention begins to love him more than anything else in the world.

Frank said every production company and studio in Hollywood right now is asking: “How can we replicate this?”

“Not just because they’re huge successes, but they’re also made for these limited budgets.”

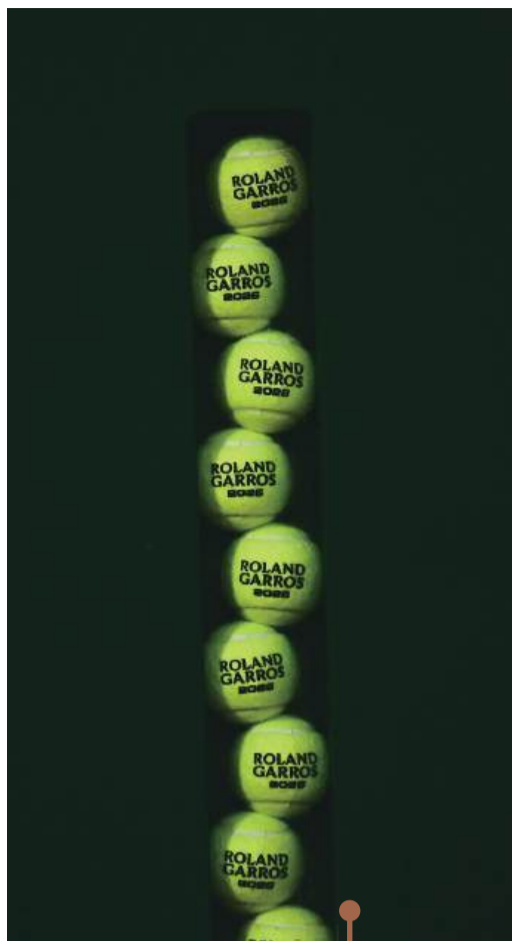
But he warned it’s not just about finding successful YouTubers.

“It still requires just finding the great filmmakers, which can come anywhere.” – AFP



Theatrical release poster for “Backrooms” – Image courtesy of Movieposters

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 15°C~28°C	Manila 25°C~30°C	New York 15°C~27°C	Lisbon 15°C~26°C
Shanghai 24°C~32°C	Bangkok 26°C~35°C	London 13°C~18°C	Rio de Janeiro 17°C~23°C
Hong Kong 25°C~31°C	Tokyo 18°C~23°C	Frankfurt 15°C~21°C	Luanda 21°C~26°C
Taipei 25°C~36°C	Singapore 26°C~33°C	Vancouver 13°C~20°C	Maputo 15°C~27°C
Guangzhou 25°C~35°C	Kuala Lumpur 25°C~35°C	Paris 13°C~20°C	Dili 21°C~32°C
Nanjing 22°C~33°C	Jakarta 24°C~33°C	Moscow 13°C~22°C	São Tomé 25°C~33°C
Guilin 23°C~34°C	Seoul 19°C~31°C	Las Vegas 23°C~39°C	Praia 20°C~30°C
Xi'an 20°C~36°C	Sydney 12°C~20°C	Monte Carlo 18°C~25°C	Bissau 24°C~35°C



**Ready for action**

This photograph shows match balls on Court Philippe-Chatrier during the quarter final singles match between Germany's Alexander Zverev and Spain's Rafael Nadal at the French Open tennis tournament at the Roland-Garros Complex in Paris yesterday. – AFP



**First Nation finery**

Britain's King Charles III poses for a picture with The National and Regional Chiefs and Elders from the Assembly of First Nations, during an audience at Buckingham Palace, London yesterday. – AFP



**Spirit lifters**

A woman browses for sweets outside a shop along an alley in the Tajrish Bazaar in Tehran, Iran yesterday. – AFP



**Cherry surprise**

People are seen in front of a giant cherry-shaped pavilion in the central pedestrian Arbat street in Moscow yesterday. – AFP



**Small snack**

An African elephant is seen at Kruger National Park in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa, on Sunday. – Xinhua



**Dinner's late!**

This photo taken on Sunday shows wild macaques at the Little Three Gorges scenic area in Wushan County, Chongqing. Macaques are national second-class protected animals in China. – Xinhua