

Sam's trip achieves 'fruitful' results, committed to exploring Spanish-speaking markets: govt

Tony Wong

Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai returned to Macau yesterday afternoon from his nine-day, four-nation European working tour, after which the Macau Government Information Bureau (GCS) said in a statement that Sam's first overseas trip in his capacity as the MSAR's chief executive has achieved "fruitful" results, comprising three main aspects, namely telling the global community the good story of the implementation of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle in Macau; "precisely" promoting business opportunities in Macau and Hengqin to Europe; and expanding the scope for Macau's external cooperation.

The statement also underlined that the delegation's visit led by Sam has also showcased the MSAR government's determination to expand into Spanish-speaking markets.

Sam led a delegation comprising local officials and representatives from the business sector on his working visit to Portugal's Lisbon and Spain's Madrid. Afterwards, the government delegation proceeded to Switzerland's Geneva and Belgium's Brussels before arriving back in Macau yesterday afternoon.

Sam arrived in Lisbon on April 18 (local time), before departing for Madrid on Tuesday last week. He travelled to Geneva on Thursday last week, before proceeding to Brussels the next day.

Sam's trip featured "a rich itinerary that achieved fruitful results and met its intended goals", yesterday's GCS statement said.

During the nine-day visit, the statement said, 46 events of various types were held, including high-level meetings, economic and trade cooperation promotion sessions, tourism promotion events, cultural and educational



Macau Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai dots the eyes of the lion during the "Macao Night" event, the closing ceremony of the "Experience Macao Roadshow in Madrid", on Tuesday last week (local time). The roadshow aiming to promote Macau's tourism, held in Madrid between April 17 and 21, was jointly organised by the MSAR government and the Chinese Embassy in Spain. — Photo: GCS

exchanges, and an exhibition showcasing the achievements of Macau's successful implementation of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle since its return to the motherland.

The MSAR was established on December 20, 1999, marking Macau's return to the motherland and the end of Portugal's temporary administration of the city.

The statement also said that over 100 cooperation agreements were signed at both

governmental and corporate levels, reaching consensus on future areas of cooperation and related projects.

The tour, the statement said, comprehensively demonstrated to the international community the significant achievements of Macau's successful implementation of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle, and enhanced mutual trust and the level of cooperation with the relevant countries, contribut-

ing to the nation's high-level opening-up.

At the same time, the statement said, positive results were achieved in promoting development opportunities in Macau and Hengqin, strengthening external exchanges and cooperation, and assisting enterprises from the Chinese mainland and Macau in jointly exploring Portuguese-speaking, Spanish-speaking and European markets.

Continued on p.6

Iran's FM conveys conditions for ending war to Pakistan: report

TEHRAN – Conveying Iran's conditions for ending the war to Pakistan, as a mediating country, is among the key purposes of Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi's return to Islamabad, Iran's semi-official Tasnim News Agency reported yesterday.

According to Tasnim, Araghchi's return to Pakistan is not related to nuclear negotiations with the United States. Instead, the foreign minister is expected to discuss bilateral relations with Pakistan, along with other

issues such as Iran's enforcement of a new legal system on the Strait of Hormuz, seeking war compensation, guarantees against repeated "aggression by the warmongers," and lifting the US naval blockade.

Araghchi arrived in Islamabad yesterday afternoon for his second visit since Friday, following a stop in Oman. His brief visit to Pakistan aims to continue consultations with Pakistani officials, it added.

Araghchi is scheduled to visit Russia

after Pakistan on the final leg of his regional tour. During his first trip to Islamabad, he met Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Army Chief Asim Munir.

On February 28, Israel and the United States launched joint attacks on Tehran and other Iranian cities, killing Iran's then-Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, senior commanders, and civilians. Iran responded with waves of missile and drone strikes targeting Israel and US assets in the Middle

East, and tightened control over the Strait of Hormuz, blocking passage by vessels belonging to or affiliated with Israel and the United States.

An April 8 ceasefire was followed by Iran-US talks in Islamabad on April 11 and 12. After the negotiations collapsed, the United States imposed a blockade on the Strait of Hormuz, preventing ships to and from Iranian ports from transiting. — Xinhua (More on Middle East war on pages 8-10)

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

The Macau Post Daily

Brick-and-mortar bookstores turn to digital tools to reconnect with readers

China's brick-and-mortar bookshops, once under pressure from the growth of online reading and e-commerce, are now adopting digital tools in an effort to reconnect with readers.

— Story on p. 7

Gunman seeks to kill Trump, cabinet at gala dinner

Investigators yesterday said the gunman who tried to storm a gala dinner attended by Donald Trump planned to assassinate the US president and other top officials, as scrutiny grew over the event's security.

— Story on p. 11

Concern stirs Lula camp as election bid loses momentum

Four months ago, the stars seemed to be aligned for veteran left-winger Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in his quest for an unprecedented fourth term as Brazilian president.

— Story on p. 12

Expansion of platform role a strategic priority for Macau



One of the most crucial deliverables of Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai's nine-day, four-nation tour of Europe is that expanding cooperation with Spanish-speaking countries has been confirmed as a strategic priority of the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR).

Addressing a reception in Madrid on Wednesday, as pointed out by Xinhua News Agency, Sam pledged to extend the functions of Macau's role as a platform for cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking countries (PSCs) to Spanish-speaking countries (SSCs).

This move represents a major expansion of Macau's traditional role as a bridge between China and the world's nine PSCs.

Actually, one of the PSCs – Equatorial Guinea – is an SSC. The central African country, a former Spanish colony, boasts three official languages: Spanish (unsurprisingly), French and Portuguese. The latter two are not locally spoken, but both were, nevertheless, given official status in 1998 and 2010, respectively, for primarily diplomatic reasons so that the country could join the Francophone Economic and Monetary Committee of Central Africa (CEMAC) and the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP).

The expansion of Macau's platform role is aligned with the Central People's Government's 15th Five-Year Plan, which was passed by the National People's Congress (NPC) last month. This national blueprint explicitly supports Macau in improving its external cooperation mechanisms and broadening its international reach.

Since its launch in August 2004, the *Post* has dedicated Page 12 to news and features about the Portuguese-speaking world – the only English-language daily in the world to do so. Moving with the times, we published a "Notice to Our Readers" on May 16 last

year said that "starting today, our Page 12 will focus on news from Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking countries – this change follows recent announcements by the central and local governments regarding their intention to strengthen Macau's commercial and cultural ties with these regions.

In an editorial on May 12 last year, headlined "Lula's visit [to China] set to further strengthen China-Brazil, LatAm-Caribbean ties", I agreed with Portuguese Consul-General Alexandre Leitão, who said on the sidelines of a function on May 10, 2025, marking the opening of consular services here by the Spanish-speaking Oriental Republic of Uruguay, which abuts Brazil, that Macau's aim to strengthen its ties with the Spanish-speaking world should be seen as a natural consequence of its ongoing effort to advance the local economy's appropriate diversification.

About 900 million people speak Spanish and Portuguese (native and non-native speakers), or around 11 percent of the global population. That's massive. Spanish is an official language in 19 countries and one territory (Puerto Rico), Portuguese in nine countries and one territory – Macau, obviously.

I also pointed out in my editorial that "as someone who has gone through the trouble (or pleasure, depending on how you look at it) of studying both languages, I would like to point out that both are quite similar but also rather different. Both Iberian languages have around 90 percent lexical similarity so that they are mutually intelligible to a large extent. Let's clarify what is at stake here – practical communication to facilitate trade, investment and cooperation as we are not aiming for literary greatness here".

Macau's then secretary for Administration and Justice André Cheong Weng Chon, who now heads the local legislature, told lawmakers in April last year that Macau and Hengqin would jointly establish a service centre for economic and trade cooperation between China and Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking countries, scheduled to start operating in the second half of that year.

The Service Centre for Economy and Trade between China and Portuguese/Spanish-speaking Countries got off the ground late last year as part of the second phase of construction for the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin.

The centre is supported by a one-billion-yuan (1.18 billion pataca) development fund specifically aimed at promoting trade and cooperation between China and both Lusophone and Hispanic markets.

Since early this year, the centre has been headed by Cao Jinfeng, who also serves as the deputy director of the Executive Committee of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone.

I understand that the centre played a prominent role in Sam's visits to Lisbon and Madrid last week, where it coordinated participation for various enterprises to help them utilise Macau's platform strengths for "going global." According to official reports, 61 deals of various kinds were signed by a range of businesses and other entities in Lisbon on the sidelines of Sam's visit, while 48 were inked in Madrid.

Of course, it remains to be seen whether all of the 109 agreements will ultimately bear fruit. Well, at the end of the day, what matters is the quality of the deals, not the quantity.

Now it is high time for local universities to follow suit by supporting Macau's expanded platform role, such as by launching Luso-Hispanic Studies degree programmes that should NOT focus on translation courses (translations are increasingly taken care of by AI, not only are they faster but often even better than those produced by human intelligence (HI) but on multidisciplinary area studies involving languages as just one of the various subjects such as history, geography, politics, economics, law, etc. Concerning translations, what we need nowadays is highly qualified staff able to edit translations. In my view, the profound knowledge of the subject at hand is more important than proficiency in the respective language. I say this as someone who passed a pretty difficult state examination in Spanish-German translation in my early 20s.

Anyhow, the advantages of Macau's emerging "dual-platform" role are multifarious. By further strengthening Macau's traditional ties of amity with Portugal (which pulled out all the stops for Sam's visit, arranging meetings with the country's top officials: the president, prime minister, speaker, and several ministers – an effort that certainly deserves praise) and setting up its new "special

relationship" with Spain (which also arranged a string of meetings with senior officials such as the second deputy vice-prime minister, deputy speaker of the Senate and foreign minister), Macau has now got two important political and economic gateways through both countries – the European Union, of which both are members, and Latin America and the Caribbean as well as Africa, such as Portugal's five former colonies there and Spain's traditionally close relationship with North Africa and the Middle East, the Maghreb in particular.

Besides, Macau offers businesses from the Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking world legal familiarity as its legal system is based on the civil law tradition, aka the Continental European law system, making it highly compatible with the legal frameworks of Spain, Portugal, its former colonies, and Spanish-speaking Latin American countries.

Moreover, Macau is a free port and low-tax economy, and it is a founding member of the World Trade Organisation (Sam met in Geneva with WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala who was full of praise of Macau's achievements after its return to the motherland in 1999) during his European tour.

Potentially, the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone will provide additional advantages to Macau's platform role, such as a place for professional services including arbitration and mediation, as well as medical and other kinds of scientific research.

Based on the 23-year long experience accumulated by the Macau-based Forum for Economic and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (Macao), aka Forum Macao, I would expect the local government, the business sector, academia and professional community to rise to the occasion and use the chance of having Macau's novel "dual platform" role, tailored by the Central People's Government to their advantage. Beyond this, the nation as a whole must also benefit – an important aspect that locals should never neglect

Forum Macao is a multilateral intergovernmental, primarily economic and commercial cooperation mechanism launched in October 2003 by the Central People's Government. It is an initiative, a de-facto "endowment", presented by the central authorities to Macau so that it could play a meaningful role on the international stage, apart from its strategic goal – also chosen by Beijing – of establishing itself as a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure. This, *en passant*, underscores the need to upgrade English-language proficiency within the local authorities – a necessity if Macau is

to meet its goal of attracting more international visitors, particularly from Southeast Asia where English serves as the lingua franca.

According to Article 13 of the Macau Basic Law, the Central People's Government has authorised the MSAR "to conduct relevant external affairs, on its own, in accordance with this Law".

Undoubtedly, Macau's external affairs must be conducted in strict agreement with Beijing's foreign policy guidelines. To suggest otherwise would be preposterous.

I have been told that the successful organisation of Sam's European tour was largely due to the effective assistance provided by China's embassies (and the Chinese Mission to the UN in Geneva). We in Macau should be grateful for their hard work.

Macau should do its utmost to assist the Central People's Government in pursuing its foreign policy goals. This applies not only to the Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking world – spanning four continents – but also to Southeast Asia, the source of most of Macau's international tourists, and the wider EU beyond the Iberian Peninsula.

I believe Macau can do much to support China's foreign policy, working in close coordination with the Foreign Ministry in Beijing and its local Commissioner's Office.

The Central People's Government has rendered immense assistance to Macau since 1999; in return, the MSAR should express its gratitude by becoming more active on the external relations front, leveraging its unique historical and cultural background.

Furthermore, Forum Macao should look beyond purely economic affairs towards cultural and scientific cooperation. Enhanced synergy between the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would, I am certain, yield significant benefits for both China and the MSAR.

One last remark: I also believe that Sam's future overseas visits should include one of the potentially most promising and most "China friendly" countries in the world – Mozambique, irrespective of its current economic woes.

The chief executive's overseas tours should be seen not merely as economic missions, but as "goodwill visits" to promote the "One Country, Two Systems" principle – the fundamental *raison d'être* behind the successful development of the MSAR.

Political and economic interests are inherently intertwined – be it at the international, national, or local level – and we must, realistically, accept this fact.

– Harald Brüning

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Macau Weather

CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY PERIODS.

A FEW SHOWERS LATER.

FORCE 3 TO 4 EAST TO

SOUTHEASTERLY WINDS.

RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL

RANGE BETWEEN 70% AND 95%.



23°C~27°C

Source: SMG

Hou Kong's fun run promotes spirit of patriotism, love for Macau

Armando Neves

Macau's Hou Kong Middle School Alumni Association hosted its one-day "BOC Cup – Hou Kong Alumni Association Fun Run and Relay Race 2026" at the Taipa Waterfront Leisure Area yesterday.

Association Chairman Ma Chi Tat said in a speech that Hou Kong Middle School has nurtured numerous outstanding young people and pillars of society since 1932. Ma expressed the hope that the association can continue to unite alumni through sporting activities, deepen social connections, and perpetuate the spirit of patriotism and love for Macau.

A representative of the Hou Kong Middle School Principal's Office, surname Fan, noted in her speech that the school's students achieved outstanding results in the 2026 university recommendation and direct admission process. A total of 13 students were admitted to Tsinghua University and Peking University, with a further 15 securing places at Fudan University.

Of the 394 senior-year students, Fan added that 308 successfully secured places through the direct admission scheme, with 216 entering the mainland's first-class universities.

Additionally, Fan noted that the school won multiple championships earlier this year in both the "Artificial Intelligence in Defence of National Security" composition and video competition and the 2025/2026 inter-school athletics championships.

Association President Hoi Kio Heng told the *Post* that the event, now in its 12th year, attracted over 300 participants. The event has been effective in bringing alumni together and promoting a culture of sport within the community, Hoi said.

Hoi pointed out that the event's souvenirs incorporate various elements of the school, such as uniform designs. He indicated that future editions may include a parent-child category and welcomed the return of graduate athletes to participate.

Lei Kam, the winner of the alumni men's division, told the *Post* that yesterday's race atmosphere and weather were favourable. He noted that the key to success in the final stage relied on regular training and perseverance. Lei advised younger students to carry forward the fighting spirit of the track and field team and expressed hope that more alumni would participate next year.

The champion of the alumni women's division, a runner surnamed Tong, also told the *Post* that it was important to maintain stability at both the start and finish, with daily practice being crucial. Tong said she believes the greatest significance of the event is the opportunity to compete alongside family and classmates each year. Tong encouraged everyone to participate in a healthy and happy spirit, guided by the motto: "Sports build a healthy body." ■



Participants in Hou Kong Middle School's "fun run" pose for a group photo in the Taipa Waterfront Leisure Area yesterday.



These three photos taken during yesterday's Hou Kong Middle School "fun run" show various aspects of the one-day activities.

– Photos courtesy of Hou Kong Middle School

Sports day promotes inclusion for people with disabilities

Khalel Vallo

The "Dynamic Community – 2026 Sports Day for People with Disabilities" was held yesterday in Praça dos Lótus in Ilha Verde district, drawing residents for an afternoon of inclusive sports and community activities.

Organised by the Sports Bureau (ID) and co-organised by the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS), Macau-China Paralympic Committee & Macau-China Recreation and Sports Association for the Disabled, Macau Special Olympics and the Macau Sports Association of the Deaf, the event featured activity booths, sport demonstrations and interactive experiences designed to promote understanding of sport for people with disabilities (PWDs).

Held from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., the programme included around 16 activity booths, alongside experiences such as wheelchair badminton and table tennis, as well as simulated visually impaired running. These activities allowed participants without disabilities to better understand the challenges faced by athletes with disabilities.

Speaking to the media, Mok Chi Hang, vice president of the Sports Bureau, said that "this year's event is very special. We invited participants and athletes to experience what sports are like for people with disabilities. We hope that by adding more elements,

more people will pay attention to disability sports and encourage greater participation from people with disabilities".

Mok added that young local athletes were invited to take part to foster mutual understanding. "We specially invited young badminton and table tennis athletes to come and experience disability sports. We hope they can better understand athletes in different situations and realise that it is not easy to be a disabled athlete. At the same time, through their influence, we can promote this event to a wider audience".



Sports Bureau (ID) Vice President Mok Chi Hang speaks to the media during yesterday's sports event in Praça dos Lótus. – Photos: Khalel Vallo

Mok noted that the initiative aims to create a two-way exchange. "It allows athletes to experience disability sports, while also helping the public understand how these sports are played and what the athletes go through. We want to share this concept with the community".

The event was divided into two parts, with a table tennis competition for PWDs held in the morning at Mong-Ha Sports Centre, attracting around 50 participants. The afternoon session then continued with community activities in Praça dos Lótus.

Reflecting on the venue, Mok said last year's results were encouraging. "We think the effect is good. Many nearby residents and people with disabilities came to participate. This year we continued with the same format and expanded the programme".

Looking ahead, he expressed hopes to further develop disability sports in Macau. "We hope to use this as a starting point to organise more sporting activities and support athletes with disabilities to take part in competitions, gradually building the development of disability sports". ■



Young athletes compete in a wheelchair badminton game during yesterday's "Dynamic Community – 2026 Sports Day for People with Disabilities" in Praça dos Lótus in Ilha Verde district.

ABOUT The Young Post

The Macau Post Daily's The Young Post will be published every Monday to present and discuss topical issues that may interest not only the younger but also all the other generations.

Critical Thinking in Action: Pui Ching Hosts 1st Secondary School Debate Challenge

Student writer: Miles Huang Yipu (S4F)
Instructor: Rachel Tou Wing Sze

Secondary school students of eight schools across the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong and Macau gathered in Pui Ching Middle School Macau to vie for top honours in the first Secondary School Debate Challenge from April 25 to 26.

The two-day event, which was conducted completely in English, was organised by the English panel of Pui Ching Middle School Macau.

"In recent years, our school has worked hard on STEAM* education, but we also care deeply about students' reasoning, communication and critical thinking skills – because they are what make us human," Kou Kam Fai, Principal of Pui Ching Middle School Macau said in his speech during the opening ceremony of the debate.

Choi Man Chi, Chief of the Government's Education and Youth Development Bureau's Non-Tertiary Education Department, also attended the opening ceremony.

In addition to improving students' English public speaking ability and strengthening their logical thinking skills, the organiser also hoped the event could encourage tighter cooperation between schools through high-level academic discussions.

Joel Ng, Panel Chair of Secondary English Section, Pui Ching Middle School Macau, said his school organised this activity to bring students from different regions together to exchange ideas and provide them with an opportunity to learn more from the others and broaden their world vision.

Schools participating in the event included Suzhou Foreign Language School, Zhuhai Yifu Experimental Secondary School, Tung Wah Group of Hospitals Lui Yun Choy Memorial College, HKTA The Yuen Yuen Institute No.3 Secondary School, Sacred Heart Canossian College (English Section), St Joseph Diocesan College (The Fifth School) (English Section), Santa Rosa de Lima (Chinese Section), Pui Ching Middle School Macau (Horta e Costa Campus), Pui Ching Middle School Macau (Coloane Campus).

By following the British Parliamentary (BP) debate format, the debate requires the students to finish the preparation within 15 minutes without any help from their coaches or technology after the motion is announced. Each contestant then has to deliver a 5-minute speech.

Fatima Mariam, a student from HKTA The Yuen Yuen Institute No.3 Secondary School in Hong Kong, said the BP debate format was a bit complicated for them and 15 minutes was too short for their preparation.

"You only have 15 minutes. It is actually trying to test your scope of knowledge, how much you understand the world...and your responsiveness," said Archie Wang Sizhe, who was one of the instructors and adjudicators in the event. Wang, who is also the captain of the Debate Team of the University of Macau, said that the BP format is one of the most common types of debate format in universities.

Zhao Ruohan, a student from Suzhou Foreign Language School in the Chinese mainland, pointed out that listening was the most important part of a debate. She said active listening is the only way to find the arguments to counter the opponent's ideas. "In the past, I used to listen in a passive way. Now I listen to every part of the speeches and summarise the main points." Zhao's team was awarded the first runner-up in the competition.

Following several rounds of intense debate, the winners have been announced. Awards were presented for Champions, First Runner-up, Second Runner-up, and Best Speaker to recognise the students' outstanding performances.

Champions:

St. Joseph Diocesan College (The Fifth School) (English Section) (Loi Ally, Ho Meng Hin)

First Runners-up:

Suzhou Foreign Language School (Chen Ziyou, Zhao Ruohan)

Second Runners-up:

Sacred Heart Canossian College (English Section) (Sara Win Sandar Maung, Chio Chi Ian);

Pui Ching Middle School Macau (Horta e Costa Campus) (Si U Hin, Ana Guo)

Best Speakers:

Ana Guo, Si U Hin, Sara Win Sandar Maung, Chio Chi Ian, Loi Ally, Zhao Ruohan

Grand Final Best Speaker:

Si U Hin

*STEAM is an educational acronym that represents five key disciplines used together to guide student inquiry, dialogue, and critical thinking. The acronym stands for: S – Science; T – Technology; E – Engineering; A – Arts; M – Mathematics. – Gemini



The guests and participants pose for a group photo at the opening ceremony last Saturday.



Students are debating in the final round.



A guest and the top three contestants pose for a photo at the closing ceremony. (From the second on the left to the right) Chio Chi Ian, Sara Win Sandar Maung, Ho Meng Hin, Loi Ally, Chen Ziyou, Zhao Ruohan, Si U Hin, Ana Guo.



A guest and the best speakers pose for a photo at the closing ceremony. (From the second on the left to the right) Ana Guo, Zhao Ruohan, Loi Ally, Chio Chi Ian, Sara Win Sandar Maung, Si U Hin.



Fatima Mariam, a student from HKTA The Yuen Yuen Institute No.3 Secondary School, speaks during the debate.



Students are preparing for their debate.



Students from Pui Ching Middle School speak during the debate.

Macau IC2 Association celebrates World Earth Day 2026

Rui Pastorin

A sixth tree was planted yesterday on Artyzen Grand Lapa Macau's Outdoor Lawn as Macau IC2 Association (I Can Too) held its annual World Earth Day initiative, marking its sixth consecutive year and continued support from the hotel operator.

The one-day event by the Macau IC2 Association, which is comprised of neurodivergent* individuals and established in 2016, was this year themed "Act Smart for the Planet. Go Green for the Future" and featured a variety of activities, with sustainability and inclusion at the forefront. It is also held in collaboration with Shenmo Star River Public Welfare Alliance and Macau Dragon Voyage Sport Association

The event featured a "Green Walkathon" from Parque Dr.Carlos d'Assumpção to the hotel's outdoor lawn, a pickleball game, a music performance using instruments made out of recycled materials, and a play therapy session that promoted communication and interaction among participants.

Speaking with the *Post* on the sidelines of yesterday's event, IC2 volunteer and event planning course instructor Ada Lo said that she has taught students from the association, along with students from the Concórdia School for Special Education, in a programme about



Macau IC2 President Antonio Leong (from right to left), Rutger Verschuren, Area Vice President, Macau and Hengqin of Artyzen Hospitality Group and General Manager of Artyzen Grand Lapa Macau, and Principal of Shenmo Star River Public Welfare Alliance Emily Ye pose after yesterday's tree planting ceremony at Artyzen Grand Lapa Macau.

organising events for six years, with the annual Earth Day initiative serving as their final graduation project.

Lo said she trains around 15 students each time in a series of classes that usually last a month and a half or more. Participants at World Earth Day, meanwhile, normally close to or over 300 people attend, each edition wanting to also show the capabilities of neurodivergent individuals.

This edition also marked the event's first collaboration with The International School of Macao (TIS), with association members creating

artworks with them, while also being involved in planning and executing the event. Lo said that she hoped the student collaboration will be taken further, introducing students to the initiative while hoping that one day, the association and schools can collaborate on organising events together, even without her training.

Meanwhile, Rutger Verschuren, Area Vice President, Macau and Hengqin of Artyzen Hospitality Group and General Manager of Artyzen Grand Lapa Macau, highlighted to the *Post* that the collaboration



Activities including the Green Walkathon take place for Macau IC2 Association's World Earth Day initiative.

– Photos: Rui Pastorin

has been both meaningful and successful throughout the years, also highlighting the growth he has seen from some of the members since the first collaboration.

The planting of the tree serves as a symbolic reminder of the event, collaboration and growth, including for the years to come. "We want to give back, but I think it's more than that", being something that they look forward to doing each time while also anticipating what is in store for the programme while highlighting its importance. "I hope we can continue

this as a tradition as a hotel so we can become part of the IC2 heartbeat". ■

*The term neurodivergent refers to people whose brains function, learn, and process information differently than what is considered "typical." It is an umbrella term used to describe a variety of neurological conditions. Rather than viewing these differences as "defects" or "disorders" that need to be cured, the concept of neurodivergence frames them as natural variations in the human genome – a concept known as neurodiversity. – Gemini

Customs seizes 51 kg of cooked food at Hengqin checkpoint



This undated handout photo provided by the Macau Customs Service on Saturday shows 51 kg of cooked food in lunch boxes seized by its officers at the Hengqin border checkpoint.

Armindo Neves

The Macau Customs Service announced in a statement on Saturday that its officers seized 51 kg of cooked food at Hengqin border checkpoint last Wednesday.

Customs identified the smuggler as a 35-year-old local man. The statement also said that he admitted to attempting to smuggle the non-quarantined food into Macau.

According to the statement, customs officers at the checkpoint's entry vehicle lane

intercepted a car, based on an alert from the cross-border Risk Management System. A follow-up inspection unearthed 51 kg of cooked food concealed in lunch boxes, hidden in the boot.

The statement also said that the case was suspected of violating relevant provisions of the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Control Regulation, adding that the case involving non-quarantined cooked food has transferred to the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) for follow up. ■

IAM steps up rubbish clearance plan for typhoon season

Khalel Vallo

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) said in a statement on Friday that it has rolled out a series of contingency measures ahead of the approaching typhoon and rainy season, with a special focus on strengthening rubbish clearance and community coordination to minimise post-disaster impact.

According to the bureau, an annual "disaster prevention and mitigation emergency plan" has been put in place before the start of the typhoon season, aimed at ensuring the swift restoration of environmental hygiene after storms or storm surges.

The plan includes joint contingency drills for rubbish clearance and transportation conducted in conjunction with Macau Residue System Company Ltd. (CSR) alongside enhanced training for disaster relief and support teams, the statement said.

According to the statement, authorities said these efforts are designed to improve staff mobilisation and inter-departmental coordination during emergencies. The bureau has also strengthened cooperation with community groups, particularly in low-lying districts, the statement noted, adding that through outreach visits, authorities are briefing neighbourhood associations on hygiene contingency measures, establishing communication mechanisms and distributing cleaning and disaster relief materials to facilitate timely clean-up efforts after typhoons.

Before the issuance of Tropical Cyclone Signal No. 8, the bureau would coordinate with the waste management



This undated and unlocated handout photo released by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) on Friday shows workers in charge of clearance and transportation of solid waste in streets and neighbourhoods assist in the clearance of rubbish.

operator to carry out advance rubbish collection across the city, the statement said, underlining that once a typhoon passes, teams immediately begin follow-up work, including inspecting waste collection facilities and assessing the overall impact on urban sanitation.

In more severe cases, additional emergency measures are activated, such as setting up temporary rubbish collection points and large skips in flood-prone areas, as well as deploying disaster relief teams to assist in clearing and transporting waste, the statement pointed out, adding that the bureau is urging residents to cooperate with its arrangements by properly disposing household waste.

The public is advised to keep rubbish indoors before Signal No. 8 is issued and dispose of it only after the signal is cancelled, the statement said,

adding that priority should be given to perishable waste, while disposal of non-household waste should be delayed to ease pressure on clearance operations.

Proper wrapping and disposal in designated facilities are also recommended to improve efficiency, the statement said. In order to further enhance awareness, the bureau continues to promote proper waste disposal practices through various channels, including public transport advertisements, posters and online platforms, particularly during the typhoon season, the statement said.

The statement also said that the strengthened measures aim to ensure faster post-typhoon recovery and maintain city hygiene, while encouraging community participation to enhance Macau's overall disaster prevention and mitigation capacity. ■

Sam's trip achieves 'fruitful' results, committed to exploring Spanish-speaking markets: govt

Continued from p.1

Lisbon

In Lisbon, the statement noted, Sam separately met with President António José Seguro, Prime Minister Luís Montenegro, President of the Supreme Court of Justice João Cura Mariano, and President of the Assembly of the Republic José Pedro Aguiar-Branco, as well as three ministers. The two sides, the statement said, engaged in comprehensive and in-depth exchanges, continuing the traditional friendship between Macau and Portugal and elevating exchanges and cooperation across multiple fields to a new level. The Portuguese leaders and officials acknowledged and positively appraised the significant achievements Macau has made in implementing the "One Country, Two Systems" principle, the statement said.

Madrid

In Madrid, the statement said, Sam established new connections and enhanced bilateral cooperation in areas such as trade and tourism, while also exploring the possibility of extending Macau's role as a China-Portuguese-speaking countries' platform into the Spanish-speaking world.

The MSAR delegation's visits to Portugal and Spain, the statement underlined, further consolidated Macau's role as a "precise connector" between China and Portuguese-speaking countries, contributing to strengthening friendly and cooperative relations between China and Portuguese-speaking countries, Spanish-speaking countries, and the European Union (EU).

Geneva

While in Geneva, the statement noted, Sam separately met with World Trade Organisation (WTO) Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Permanent Representative of China to the WTO Li Yongjie, and Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations Office at Geneva and other

International Organisations in Switzerland Jia Guide. These meetings, the statement said, deepened liaison mechanisms, strengthened platform alignment, and enhanced international organisations' understanding of Macau's platform functions. The visit to Geneva also strengthened the functions of the Macao Economic and Trade Office to the WTO, injecting new momentum for the MSAR government to more vigorously participate in international affairs such as multilateral trade.

Brussels

In Brussels, the statement noted, Sam paid a courtesy call on Belgian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Employment, Economy and Agriculture David Clarinval, while meeting with Chinese Ambassador to Belgium Fei Shengchao, apart from meeting representatives of the Chinese community in the country. By strengthening mutual ties and alignment, the statement said, the meetings deepened economic and trade exchanges between Macau and Belgium, while expanding fields for bilateral exchanges and cooperation.

EU headquarters

At the EU headquarters in Brussels, the statement noted, Sam separately met with Olof Skoog, deputy secretary general for Political Affairs of the EU's European External Action Service, Cai Run, head of the Chinese Mission to the EU, and Younous Omarjee, a vice-president of the European Parliament. The meetings, the statement said, helped consolidate and develop the trade partnership between Macau and the EU, with pledges to expand cooperative relations in areas such as innovative technology, green technology, higher education, and cultural and tourism industries.

The statement noted that Sam also visited the Macao Economic and Trade Office to the European Union, encouraging all staff to work together to assist the MSAR government in

further strengthening its ties and cooperation with the EU.

'Significant results in 3 main aspects'

The statement said that Sam's tour has achieved significant results in three main aspects.

The **first aspect** is telling the global community the good story of the implementation of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle in Macau and highlighting its significant advantages and strong vitality.

Through an exhibition held in Lisbon, and in-depth exchanges with national leaders and senior officials during the four-nation European tour, the successful implementation of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle in Macau and its remarkable achievements were comprehensively showcased to the international community, the statement said.

The statement said that the tour further enhanced the international community's understanding and recognition of the institutional advantages of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle, highlighting Macau's unique role and historical responsibility in the nation's overall development. The tour laid a more solid foundation for Macau to play a more active role in the nation's high-level opening-up.

The **second aspect** is "precisely" promoting business opportunities in Macau and Hengqin to Europe; and expanding the scope for Macau's external cooperation.

The MSAR government organised a delegation of about 120 entrepreneurs to join the tour, comprising enterprise representatives from Macau, Hengqin, and various other places in the Chinese mainland, demonstrating the innovative model of synergistic development of "Macau + Chinese mainland + International Market" to jointly explore a broader market scope.

During the tour, the MSAR government delegation, together with the entrepreneurs, met senior officials from Portugal and Spain,

establishing mutual connections and building platforms for cooperation.

In addition, a large-scale tourism promotion event was held in Madrid, and Sam engaged in in-depth exchanges with the secretary-general of the United Nations World Tourism Organisation, Shaikha Al Nuwais. This was conducive to promoting high-quality tourism cooperation and establishing a robust platform for the tourism industry to strengthen exchanges.

The **third aspect** is expanding the scope for Macau's external cooperation and contributing to the nation's high-level opening-up.

During the tour, Sam attended intangible cultural heritage performances to enhance Macau-Portugal cultural exchanges; met and interacted with Macau students studying in Portugal, encouraging the young people to study diligently and promote China-Portugal friendship; and met government officials and representatives of international organisations across multiple fields. This further broadened the MSAR's multifaceted exchanges and cooperation with relevant countries and international organisations.

This overseas tour was a practical move in building Macau into a crucial bridgehead for the country's high-level opening-up, and a vital window for exchange and mutual learning between Chinese and Western civilisations. It tangibly reflected Macau's determination to better leverage its unique advantage of being backed by the motherland and connected to the world and making greater contributions to the country's high-level opening-up.

This just-concluded tour marked the first time an MSAR chief executive visited Spain and Geneva. This overseas tour was not only an important milestone in the MSAR government's commitment to expanding external exchanges and cooperation, but also highlighted the strategic direction of the current-term MSAR government to extend the Macau platform and actively participate in international multilateral cooperation. ■

Verschuren expects high hotel room occupancy for Labour Day holiday

Rui Pastorin

Vice Chairman of the Macau Hotel Association Rutger Verschuren says that he expects a "very good" hotel room occupancy rate for the Labour Day holiday on Friday and Saturday, but notes that there will be a drop in occupancy and room rates starting Sunday, the hotelier told English-language media on the sidelines of yesterday's World Earth Day event hosted at Artyzen Grand Lapa Macau.

Verschuren is also the Area Vice President, Macau and Hengqin of Artyzen Hospitality Group and General Manager of Artyzen Grand Lapa Macau.

The Labour Day Golden Week holiday in the Chinese mainland lasts a total of five days. Verschuren noted that there will still be high occupancy for five days, though room rates will drop on the third day.

Verschuren added that overall, he believes that room rates have been slightly below last year, by around 10 percent across the city, noting that it is less expensive for tourists while the association is still happy with it, noting that Macau "is still in a very



Vice Chairman of the Macau Hotel Association Rutger Verschuren takes part in an activity during yesterday's annual World Earth Day initiative by IC2 Association (I Can Too). - Photo: Rui Pastorin

good condition". However, a slight drop in international visitor arrivals can be observed due to the ongoing [Iran] war, he said.

"A few of our arrivals still fly through Dubai", noting that some are flying again with Emirates as the prices are much more affordable, though one needs to be prepared for a stopover and some delay.

However, an upside is more regional travel, said Verschuren, with people opting to travel to places such as the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong, China's Taiwan region and South Korea. "They'd also rather not fly to Europe at this time, so they're making shorter trips. So that is the upside. We see more of that at the moment", he noted. ■

Albergue SCM Wishing Well, Love Tree raise 24,000 patacas, support 3 cancer patients

Rui Pastorin

A total of 24,000 patacas was raised through the "Albergue SCM Wishing Well and Love Tree 2026" during its run from January 26 to March 22 at Albergue SCM*, with the amount recently donated to three cancer patients undergoing treatment.

The announcement was made by CAC – Círculo dos Amigos da Cultura de Macau ("Circle of the Friends of Macau's Culture") in a statement on Saturday, adding that each patient, through the referral and coordination of Caritas Macau, received 8,000 patacas. Caritas Macau Secretary-General Paul Pun Chi Meng and CAC representatives presented the amount to two beneficiaries, while the third received their donation as arranged from Caritas Macau

on CAC's behalf, the statement added.

The statement said that CAC has held the wishing well for charity organisations and the disadvantaged since 2015, inviting visitors to make a wish and drop a coin into the well and donation box to make their Chinese New Year Wishes.

"CAC once again thanks the visitors who contribute to this charitable event. Although this may be only a small financial aid when treating cancer, it is still an important and meaningful act", promising to continue the event and support those in need, CAC pointed out in the statement. ■

*Albergue is Portuguese for "hospice". SCM stands for Santa Casa da Misericórdia ("Holy House of Mercy"), Macau's oldest charitable organisation.

Police arrest local woman for 600,000 pataca 'swimming course discount' fraud

Armando Neves

The Judiciary Police (PJ) arrested a local woman for a 600,000 pataca "swimming course discount" deception on Thursday, PJ spokesman Cheong Siu Keong said during a special press conference on Friday.

Cheong identified the suspect as a 39-year-old woman surnamed Leong, who claimed to be unemployed.

According to Cheong, in mid-2023, a Macau swimming association hired Leong for a clerical position, including collecting tuition fees, recording student numbers and coordinating class schedules, adding that in mid-2025, the association noticed an

increase in student numbers but discovered a discrepancy in the tuition fees collected.

The association requested that Leong provide student records for verification, but she repeatedly delayed doing so, Cheong said.

At the end of last November, Leong left her job and cut off all contact. The association subsequently reported the matter to the police, according to Cheong.

PJ officers arrested Leong in the peninsula's central district on Thursday. Officers revealed that, starting in April 2024, Leong falsely claimed the swimming association was offering a promotional scheme, telling parents that paying tuition fees

in a single lump sum would grant them additional free classes. Leong changed the name of her personal e-payment M-pay account to match the name of the swimming association, leading parents to mistakenly believe the fees were being collected by the association, Cheong said. A total of 159 students were defrauded, with each family losing between 1,500 and 3,700 patacas.

Cheong said that the total amount involved was 600,000 patacas, and Leong has admitted that all the money was used for personal expenses and debt repayment.

Leong was transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) on Friday, facing a charge of fraud. ■



Judiciary Police (PJ) officers escort the fraud suspect, surnamed Leong, to PJ car outside the PJ headquarters in Zape on Friday. — Photo: Armando Neves

Participants in Shanghai seminar refute illegal South China Sea arbitration award

SHANGHAI – Participants in a special seminar held in Shanghai yesterday refuted the "Arbitral Award on the South China Sea," stressing that it is illegal, null and void, and non-binding, ignores historical facts, deviates from the principle of fairness and justice, and undermines international rule of law and regional mutual trust.

Qi Dahai, Director-General of the Department of Treaty and Law of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, said the arbitral tribunal in the South China Sea arbitration overstepped its jurisdiction and perverted justice, and the "award" it rendered in 2016 is illegal, null and void.

The Philippines has attempted to legitimize the illegal award through various means and mislead international public opinion, falsely claiming the award as part of international law and sparing no effort to smear China, Qi said.

China insists on respecting historical facts and advocating international rule of law, firmly safeguarding its national maritime rights and interests, and making unremitting efforts to build the South China Sea into a sea of peace, friendship and cooperation, the official added.

Wu Shicun, Chairman of Huayang Center for Maritime Cooperation and Ocean Governance, said the illegal award is fraught with major jurisdictional flaws and legal fallacies, violates the basic norms of international law, and is in essence a political farce.

Wu, who is also Chairman of the Academic Committee at the National Institute for South China Sea Studies, called for

resolutely countering unilateral infringements and public opinion manipulation based on the illegal award, while firmly upholding the international rule of law as well as regional peace and stability.

Participants stated that the illegal award contains fundamental fallacies in such aspects as the tribunal's jurisdiction, historic rights, legal status of islands and offshore archipelago regime.

They reaffirmed that China has indisputable sovereignty over the South China Sea islands and their adjacent waters, as well as sovereign rights and jurisdiction over relevant maritime areas. China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests in the South China Sea are supported by solid historical and legal evidence.

Participants called for continued endeavors in exposing the politically manipulated nature of the award and for continued work in pursuit of a fair and reasonable solution to the South China Sea issue.

The special seminar was held during the 2026 annual academic conference of the Chinese Society of International Law. Held from Friday to yesterday, the conference attracted over 1,500 participants, including government officials, experts, scholars, legal practitioners and young students.

During the conference themed "Uphold the International Rule of Law, Enhance Global Governance," the Chinese Society of International Law issued a statement calling on all countries to abide by international law and oppose the unlawful use of force.

—Xinhua

Brick-and-mortar bookstores turn to digital tools to reconnect with readers

Analysis

JINAN – China's brick-and-mortar bookshops, once under pressure from the growth of online reading and e-commerce, are now adopting digital tools in an effort to reconnect with readers.

Founded in 2014 in Binzhou, Shandong Province, Puhe Reading Space began as a small traditional bookshop reliant on book sales. When online competition squeezed margins, it moved away from price wars and began using digital platforms to cultivate reader communities.

"Online channels such as our e-shop and WeChat groups allow us to maintain full-lifecycle engagement with our members," said Wang Hong, the bookshop's founder. She added that the bookstore also uses livestream sessions as a kind of "online living room," where staff and long-time readers can deepen their connections through cultural conversations.

A recent national reading survey showed that the overall reading rate among Chinese adults rose to 82.3 percent in 2025. However, digital formats now dominate the market, with nearly 80 percent of readers using mobile phones to meet their literary needs.

Industry experts said brick-and-mortar bookstores will need to offer immersive, in-person experiences that digital reading cannot replicate, turning bookstores into part of a broader lifestyle.

"Even in the internet era, people cannot confine all aspects of life to the virtual world. They still need a connection with what is around them," said Ma Ruijie, an associate professor at the School of Journalism and Communication, Nankai University.

To draw people back into physical spaces, some bookstores are experimenting with formats that go beyond traditional reading,

combining immersive in-person experiences with digital tools to reshape how readers engage with books.

In a shopping mall in Zhengzhou, a bookstore has introduced five small theaters that stage scenes from classic books as immersive performances, turning what was once a quiet retail space into a cultural venue.

In Wuhan, Hubei Province, a bookstore has developed a circular reading model through an online mini-program, allowing readers to resell books after finishing them while receiving recommendations based on their reading habits.

Puhe has also embraced artificial intelligence (AI), hosting workshops that teach readers how to turn passages from classic literature into visual posters.

"AI has not replaced reading," Wang said. "Instead, it has become a powerful tool for broadening cultural reach."

Across the sector, such efforts reflect a broader rethinking of the services that bookstores try to provide.

Physical bookstores remain irreplaceable as cultural and social spaces, where readers seek not only books, but spiritual resonance and a sense of belonging, said Zhao Jianying, a professor at the University of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

He added that digital reading and physical reading serve different functions and are complementary rather than substitutes. "Digital reading solves the problem of access, while physical bookstores and print reading enable deeper engagement," he said.

That shift is also seeing strong policy support. A regulation on promoting nationwide reading, which took effect in February, encourages brick-and-mortar bookstores to improve reading

conditions and carry out reading activities, while strengthening their role in providing public reading services.

This year's government work report for the first time calls for supporting the development of physical bookstores. At the same time, local governments have introduced measures such as rent reductions and integration into public cultural systems.

Zhang Xiao, an industry observer based in Zhejiang Province, said the core competitiveness of brick-and-mortar bookstores lies in combining quality content with improved operational efficiency.

AI technology helps address high labour costs and low service efficiency, Zhang said, adding that the sector is expected to encourage bookstores across the country to share resources and work more closely through technology, in an effort to explore more sustainable business models.

China is home to about 120,000 brick-and-mortar bookstores. Against this backdrop, some long-standing bookstores are beginning to return.

In Fuzhou, Xiaofeng Bookstore on Guping Road, which had been closed for eight years, recently switched its lights back on. Today, readers can not only read books and enjoy tea here but also participate in activities such as book club meetings and cultural salons.

Zhang Lianwang, who is involved in the reopening project, noted that while maintaining its own editorial focus, Xiaofeng aims to offer more personalized content and more convenient digital services, opening up greater possibilities for physical bookstores.

The comeback has been welcomed by many readers as a long-awaited "reunion." As one reader once put it: "There are places that algorithms can never reach."

—Xinhua

Thai court accepts ethics case against opposition leader, MPs

BANGKOK – A Thai court decided on Friday to hear a case against 10 MPs, including the leader of the largest opposition party, for trying to reform the royal insult law, but refrained from suspending them.

The progressive People's Party, led by Natthaphong Ruengpanyawut, came second in February's general election.

An earlier iteration of the organisation had put forward draft legislation to amend the strict lese-majeste law.

The National Anti-Corruption Commission referred their actions to the Supreme Court, alleging a potential breach of ethics.

The court said Friday it accepted the case, but decided not to exercise its power to immediately suspend the MPs from their parliamentary positions.

The case "carries sufficient weight for the court to proceed with its consideration", one of the three-judge Supreme Court panel said.

But the court "has not ordered the suspension of the MPs' duties", he added.

At a news conference after Friday's ruling, Natthaphong said the legal reform effort was "never intended to undermine the democratic system under the monarchy".



Natthaphong Ruengpanyawut (centre), member of parliament and leader of Thailand's opposition People's Party, speaks during a press conference alongside fellow party MPs accused of proposing amendments to the lese-majeste law, in Bangkok on Friday. – AFP

"Our objective goes beyond political careers – it is about ensuring equality for the people," he said.

"We will contest this case in the supreme court to defend the rights of MPs within a democratic parliamentary system and to ensure that Thailand's democracy genuinely serves its people."

If they are found guilty, Natthaphong and the other nine newly re-elected MPs could face lifetime bans on holding political office and be stripped of their right to vote for 10 years.

They are among 44 current and former progressive MPs accused over the February 2021 proposal to change the lese-majeste law.

The century-old measure, known as Section 112 in Thailand, shields the king and his family from criticism and carries a maximum sentence of up to 15 years per offence.

Thailand's constitutional court dissolved the predecessor of the People's Party, Move Forward, in 2024, ruling its actions amounted to an attempt to overthrow the constitutional monarchy. – AFP

ASEAN officials convene to address Middle East risks to energy supply

MANILA – The Philippines, this year's chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), convened senior officials to assess the impact of the evolving Middle East situation on global and regional energy markets, focusing on oil and gas supply stability, price volatility and potential supply chain disruptions, the Department of Energy said yesterday.

During a virtual meeting on

Friday, ASEAN member states and dialogue partners shared updates on current supply conditions and explored cooperation on supply diversification, access to energy resources, market transparency and emergency response coordination.

Technical briefings highlighted constraints in key supply routes and shifting global trade flows affecting the region. Officials stressed the need to strengthen monitoring systems, improve data

transparency and advance strategies for strategic stockholding and emergency reserves, taking into account national circumstances.

In a separate statement, the regional bloc said participants underscored the urgency of enhancing ASEAN's collective preparedness and response mechanisms, while reinforcing regional solidarity and coordinated policy actions to manage emerging risks. – AFP

S Korea arrests man for spreading AI-generated image of escaped wolf

SEOUL – South Korean police said on Friday they had arrested a man for distributing an AI-generated image of a wolf that escaped from a zoo this month, triggering a frantic search.

The two-year-old male wolf named Neukgu dug out of his enclosure in the central city of Daejeon on April 8 and was on the run for nine days before being recaptured.

The city government and major media outlets shared an image that had spread widely online purporting to show a light-brown wolf trotting through a junction after its escape.

The image was fake and had been created using artificial

intelligence, subsequent analysis showed.

The Daejeon Metropolitan police told AFP they had arrested a man in his 40s on Thursday on charges of obstructing official duties by deception, specifically for "distributing fabricated wolf sighting images created using generative AI".

They said the man admitted to the charges during questioning, saying he did it "just for fun".

"A single AI-manipulated image delayed the capture of the wolf by as many as nine days," police said.

"The prolonged deployment of police and fire personnel caused significant disruption to their primary

duty of protecting the public."

Neukgu's escape prompted a local elementary school to close over safety concerns, and the local government sent hundreds of firefighters, police officers and troops in a bid to get him back.

Authorities also deployed drones and thermal cameras to track down the 30-kilogram runaway, who kept slipping through the net despite several sightings.

He was finally recaptured on April 17 after authorities received a tip about a sighting in a park.

An AFP analysis later confirmed that the AI-generated image was inauthentic. AFP had initially redistributed the image and later withdrew it. – AFP

Philippines says 2 US citizens among 19 killed in raid

MANILA – Two US citizens were among 19 people killed in a raid on an alleged communist stronghold in the Philippines that has sparked a probe by the country's rights commission, a government task force said.

More than 300 residents in the Toboso municipality of Negros island fled their homes on April 19 as gunfire rang out in the remote sugar cane-farming region, the municipal disaster management office told AFP last week.

The number of people killed in the firefight, in which only one soldier was wounded, sparked calls for an investigation.

The two Americans, identified as Lyle Prijoles and Kai Dana-Rene Sorem, arrived in Negros Occidental province about a month before they were killed, the task force said in a statement late Saturday.

"The National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) notes with serious concern the confirmation that a second American national was among those killed in the April 19, 2026 armed encounter," the statement said.

"This brings to two the number of US citizens... who died in the same incident," it added, identifying all 19 killed as "combatant" members of the New People's Army (NPA), which has been fighting a long-running insurgency for nearly 60 years.

Prijoles' name had been released shortly after the clash.

The US Embassy did not

immediately respond to a request for comment.

'Not a massacre'

"The military operations carried out by the Philippine Army's 79th Infantry Battalion ... warrant an urgent investigation," Congresswoman Leila de Lima said Saturday.

She pointed to the deaths of a young student and a community journalist in the raid.

In a separate statement, local rights monitor Karapatan said the "sheer number of those killed triggers significant questions and conclusions on the conduct of the AFP (Armed Forces of the Philippines) operations".

The Philippine military, which handed out medals to a number of soldiers involved, said the raid was "a legitimate armed encounter, not a massacre", noting the seizure of 24 firearms.

Addressing a probe launched by the country's Commission on Human Rights, Philippine Army spokesman Colonel Louie Demala told reporters yesterday the military was "open to investigation and the evidence will speak for us".

The military told AFP last week it had been fighting "remnants" of the NPA near the Toboso municipality.

Demala said the area was "one of the more active remnants of the (guerrilla) front in the central Philippines".

The military estimates the rebel group has fewer than 2,000 armed members left. – AFP

Thai police arrest Indonesian wanted for US\$10 million cyberfraud

BANGKOK – Police in Thailand have arrested an Indonesian who allegedly defrauded Americans of about US\$10 million, Thai authorities said yesterday, adding that they will extradite him to the United States.

The 33-year-old Indonesian man was arrested on Friday at a luxury resort in the coastal town of Phuket after a tip-off from the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Suriya Pounsombat of the national immigration police told AFP.

The FBI had informed Thai authorities that the suspect left Dubai and travelled to the Southeast Asian nation on Wednesday, according to Suriya.

After his arrest, the man was sent to an immigration detention centre in the capital Bangkok and was awaiting extradition to the United States, he said.

"The FBI said he was wanted for committing fraud against Americans of about US\$10 million," he added.

The FBI did not immediately respond to an AFP request for comment yesterday.

Another Thai immigration police officer told local media that the suspect allegedly hired models to lure targets into phony investment

schemes over video calls, dating apps and social media, and he managed the scams from the United Arab Emirates.

Southeast Asia has emerged as a hotspot for cyberscam operations in recent years, with organised criminal groups using casinos, hotels and fortified compounds in the region as bases to carry out sophisticated online cons.

Cyberscammers have defrauded victims around the world of tens of billions of dollars annually, often through fake cryptocurrency investments and phony romantic relationships.

But fraudsters and their associates are also believed to have expanded outside the region.

According to a 2025 report from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, foreign workers in the UAE have been "lured into scam work in Southeast Asia", suggesting "Dubai is becoming a global hub for recruitment and trafficking linked to the cyber-enabled fraud industry".

The UAE, the report adds, "have been targeted as a base for individuals involved in the laundering of funds acquired through illicit online activity, many of whom have purchased property in Dubai". – AFP

Orangutan uses Indonesia canopy bridge in 'world first': NGO

JAKARTA – A Sumatran orangutan has been filmed for the first time crossing a man-made canopy bridge constructed to help the endangered animals bypass a tarred road on the Indonesian island, an NGO said yesterday.

Conservation group Tangguh Hutan Khatulistiwa, in partnership with the UK-based charity Sumatra Orangutan Society (SOS) and local authorities, built five canopy bridges in the North

Sumatra province in 2024, after a road that serves as a lifeline for remote communities had been expanded, cutting through the rainforest.

The first Sumatran orangutan has now been caught on camera using one of the hanging bridges, SOS said in a statement sent to AFP yesterday.

While other species including gibbons and long-tailed macaques have also been spotted crossing there, "this is a world first for

Sumatran orangutans," it added.

The bridge's use by the orangutan was a "huge milestone for conservation", SOS chief executive Helen Buckland said.

"These canopy bridges demonstrate that human development and wildlife don't have to be at odds. Sometimes, the simplest solutions are the most effective," Buckland added.

The road is an important social and economic link for communities

in Sumatra's Pakpak Bharat district.

But it has also split a population of some 350 orangutans, SOS said.

Erwin Alamsyah Siregar, executive director at Tangguh Hutan Khatulistiwa, said that habitat fragmentation was "one of the greatest challenges in contemporary conservation".

He said he hoped canopy bridges would become a "standard feature" of infrastructure planning across the region.

The International Union for

Conservation of Nature classifies Sumatran orangutans, endemic to the island of Sumatra, as critically endangered.

Their decline is blamed on habitat loss and fragmentation as well as illegal hunting.

In the wild, orangutans are found only on Sumatra and the nearby island of Borneo, which is shared between Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei. – AFP

Malaysia appoints new anti-graft chief

KUALA LUMPUR – Malaysia appointed on Saturday a former high court judge as the country's new anti-graft czar to replace its outgoing chief who was dogged by allegations of abuse of power and illegal shareholding.

The appointment of Abdul Halim Aman comes as Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's government faces increased scrutiny on promises made to tackle corruption in the Southeast Asian nation.

"The government is confident that with his extensive experience and high integrity, (Abdul) will be able to strengthen governance, enhance public confidence and intensify anti-corruption efforts in the interest of the nation," Chief Secretary to the Government, Shamsul Azri Abu Bakar said Saturday.

Abdul is set to replace Azam Baki who has been at the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission's (MACC) helm since 2020.

Azam has faced several allegations during his tenure, including that he improperly held

shares in a public listed company.

The government ordered a probe into the allegations but has made no public findings.

The MACC – a federal agency set up in 2009 to probe and prosecute graft in the public and private sectors – has powers to summon individuals, search and seize property and arrest suspects.

Azam and the MACC have denied all allegations of misconduct.

Malaysia is still battling the shadow of the massive 1MDB corruption scandal that saw top officials loot billions from state funds to splurge on luxury assets over a decade ago.

The scandal shook Malaysian politics, contributing to the 2018 downfall of the ruling coalition that had governed since independence in 1957.

Anwar was elected in 2022 on a strong anti-graft platform, calling the 1MDB scandal "state-level kleptocracy".

But a perceived soft stance on Azam has led to unease and growing tension within Anwar's own party and with other major partners in the country's ruling coalition. – AFP

Mideast war drives up condom, rubber glove prices: manufacturers

KUALA LUMPUR – Prices of rubber products have shot up due to supply chain disruptions stemming from the Middle East war, the world's largest condom maker and a leading glove manufacturer, both based in Malaysia, said on Friday.

Karex, which supplies condoms for brands like Trojan and Durex, said it had to increase prices by up to 30 percent, while global supplier Top Glove said the main material for synthetic rubber gloves had doubled in cost.

Much of Malaysia's rubber industry relies on oil to produce goods, but supply has been scarce since Iran imposed a de facto closure of the Strait of Hormuz, through which around a fifth of global crude and liquefied natural gas passes in peacetime.

The closure, which began after the United States and Israel launched strikes on February 28, has also affected raw material costs and disrupted global shipping.

"We continue to experience longer lead times from suppliers, increased price volatility and higher freight costs," Karex chief executive Goh Miah Kiat said.

"In the meantime, we are also holding more key raw materials critical for business operations, and hence requiring the need to increase costs by up to 30 percent," Goh told AFP in an email.

A crucial raw material affected,



In this picture taken September 20, 2017, a worker packs condoms at the Malaysian condom-maker Karex Industries headquarters in Port Klang.

– AFP

silicone oil, is "used in every condom", Karex said.

Karex makes more than five billion condoms yearly, helping to prevent unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases across the globe. It provides condoms to organisations such as Britain's National Health Service and the World Health Organisation.

The prices of other Karex products, from personal lubricants and probe covers to catheters and aluminium foil packaging, have also increased, Goh said.

Costs have been affected "across the board", including the price of condom material nitrile latex and natural rubber.

Top Glove, one of the world's leading manufacturers of rubber gloves, said it was particularly

hard hit by a sharp hike in the price of nitrile butadiene rubber "which has increased by more than 100 percent, reflecting tight supply".

"For natural rubber gloves, input costs have risen by approximately 30 percent, as natural rubber is a traded commodity which is impacted by the uptrend in crude oil prices," the company added.

Top Glove supplies 95 billion gloves per year to more than 2,000 customers worldwide.

Both manufacturers said the supply of their main products remained stable.

"However, longer ship lead times are causing lower inventory levels at our customers' end, and certain condom manufacturers are facing challenges in production," Karex's Goh said. – AFP

Sri Lanka detains 22 Buddhist monks for drug smuggling

COLOMBO – Twenty-two Sri Lankan monks returning from Thailand were arrested yesterday at the main international airport with 110 kilogrammes of powerful cannabis, officials said.

A Sri Lanka Customs spokesman said the group, returning home after a four-day holiday in the Thai capital, had Kush – a potent, strain of marijuana – hidden in their luggage.

"Each carried about five kilos of the narcotic concealed within false walls in their luggage," the spokesman said, adding that the monks had been handed over to police.

They were to be taken before a magistrate later yesterday.

The monks were mostly young students from temples across Sri Lanka and had been on a holiday sponsored by a businessman.

Customs officials said it was the largest single detection of Kush at the South Asian country's main international airport.

A 21-year-old British woman was arrested in May last year with 46 kilograms of the drug at the same airport. She was also travelling to Colombo from Bangkok.

Sri Lankan authorities have also made several detections of large hauls of heroin and other narcotics smuggled in via small fishing boats in recent years. – AFP



Sri Lankan monks are taken to a detention centre in Colombo, Sri Lanka after a court hearing in Negombo yesterday. – AFP

S Korean prosecutors seek 30 years for Yoon over drone flights into North

SEOUL – South Korean special prosecutors requested a further 30-year term for jailed ex-president Yoon Suk Yeol on Friday for allegedly sending military drones into North Korea in 2024.

Yoon is accused of ordering the incursion to help create the pretext for his failed declaration of martial law that year, which resulted in his impeachment, removal from office and life imprisonment for insurrection.

Special prosecutors said in a statement that they were seeking the new sentence on charges of aiding the enemy, adding that Yoon's effort to "fabricate wartime conditions" had undermined state security.

They also argued that the operation heightened tensions with North Korea and led to the leak of classified information – including

details about force capabilities – after the drones crashed, the Yonhap news agency reported.

Yoon was sentenced to life in jail in February for leading an insurrection to "paralyse" South Korea's National Assembly.

He has appealed against the conviction, insisting that he declared martial law "solely for the sake of the nation".

Yoon's legal team denied the new charge and said there was "no prior order or subsequent approval" by him for the drone operation cited by prosecutors.

They said the operation was in response to North Korea sending balloons carrying trash across the border that year and was "a legitimate act of self-defence" unrelated to Yoon's martial law declaration.

His lawyers dismissed the

prosecution's claims as a "speculative and false novel".

Drone flights remain a flashpoint in tensions between the two Koreas, which remain technically at war.

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung expressed regret this month after an investigation found government officials had sent drones into the nuclear-armed North in January.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's powerful sister called Lee's statement "wise behaviour", but hopes for a rapprochement faded after the diplomatically isolated nation returned to calling the South its "most hostile" enemy.

Lee has vowed to mend ties with North Korea by halting the kind of provocations carried out under his predecessor, and has suggested a rare apology could be warranted for Yoon's use of the drones. – AFP

Iranian FM returns to Pakistan despite US cancelling talks

ISLAMABAD – Iran’s foreign minister returned to Islamabad yesterday, ping-ponging from capital to capital as mediators hoped to keep peace talks between Tehran and the United States alive.

Abbas Araghchi visited Oman’s Muscat on Saturday after leaving Pakistan, and is set to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow today, but there remained no indication that direct US-Iranian talks would resume.

On Saturday, US President Donald Trump scotched a planned trip to Islamabad by his negotiators Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner.

But in a sign that indirect efforts were ongoing, the Fars news agency reported that Iran had transmitted “written messages” to the Americans via Pakistan that were “about some of the red lines of the Islamic Republic of Iran, including nuclear issues and the Strait of Hormuz”.

Those messages were not, however, part of any negotiations, Fars said.

While a ceasefire in the US-Israeli war with Iran that began on April 8 has so far held, the economic shockwaves of the war continue to reverberate around the globe.

Iran has sealed off the Strait of Hormuz, cutting off vast quantities of oil, natural gas and fertiliser from the global market, sending prices soaring and raising fears of widespread hunger across the developing world.

There had been hopes for a new round of talks on Saturday, with Witkoff and Kushner due to visit Islamabad, but Trump later told Fox News he had scrapped the trip, saying there was no point “sitting around talking about nothing”.

Yesterday, Trump told the channel: “I said, we’re not doing this anymore. We have all the cards. If they want to talk, they can come to us, or they can call us, you know there is a telephone, we have nice secure lines.”

The president is under growing domestic pressure, with petrol prices in the United States pushed up by Iran’s closure of Hormuz and midterm elections scheduled for November.

‘Very fruitful’

Asked earlier whether halting the



Iranians stop for something to eat and drink near Chitgar Lake, an artificial recreational lake and park officially known as the Lake of the Martyrs of the Persian Gulf, in northwestern Tehran, yesterday. Iran’s foreign minister returned to Islamabad, Pakistan, for more consultations yesterday, as international mediators tried to keep peace talks on track despite the US President calling off his envoys’ planned trip. – AFP

trip meant a return to open hostilities, Trump said: “No, it doesn’t mean that.”

Later, after a gunman was arrested at the White House Correspondents’ Association dinner in Washington, Trump said he did not think the incident was related to Iran but that it would not deter him “from winning the war”.

On Saturday, Araghchi met Pakistan’s military chief Asim Munir, a key mediator, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, before flying on to Muscat.

He was expected to go to Moscow after the talks in Islamabad, with Russia’s foreign ministry confirming that he would meet President Vladimir Putin.

Araghchi described his initial Pakistan trip as “very fruitful” but signalled scepticism over Washington’s intentions, saying he had “yet to see if the US is truly serious about diplomacy”.

Hormuz blockade deepens

Pressure to end the war has intensified as the Strait of Hormuz remains closed.

But Iran’s powerful Revolutionary Guards said they had no intention of lifting their blockade, which has roiled energy markets.

“Controlling the Strait of Hormuz and maintaining the shadow of its deterrent effects over America and the White House’s supporters in the region is the definitive strategy of Islamic Iran,” the Guards said on their official Telegram channel.

The United States has imposed

a blockade of Iranian ports in retaliation.

In a statement carried by state media, Iran’s military warned that continued US “blockading, banditry and piracy” would draw a response.

Israel strikes Lebanon

On the war’s Lebanese front, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered strikes on Hezbollah and accused the Iran-backed group of violating a ceasefire that was extended this week.

“It must be understood that Hezbollah’s violations are, in practice, dismantling the ceasefire,” Netanyahu said, during yesterday’s weekly cabinet meeting.

Hezbollah itself said it would respond to Israeli ceasefire violations and its “continued occupation of Lebanese territory”.

Lebanese official media said Israel’s military began striking the country’s south after issuing an evacuation warning for seven locations, despite the ceasefire with the Iran-backed group.

“Israeli warplanes launched a strike” in Kfar Tibnit – one of the locations included in the warning – the state-run National News Agency said, adding that there were reports of casualties.

Under the terms of the ceasefire, Israel reserves the right to act against “planned, imminent or ongoing attacks”. – AFP

Syrian court begins proceedings against Assad and allies

DAMASCUS – A Syrian court conducted the first hearing yesterday in the trial of ousted ruler Bashar al-Assad and senior figures from his government, one of whom appeared in person.

Assad and his brother Maher have fled Syria and will be tried in absentia, but one of their relatives, former security official Atif Najib, was in the dock in handcuffs.

“Today we begin the first trials of transitional justice in Syria,” judge Fakh al-Din al-Aryan declared as he opened the session.

“This includes a defendant in custody, present in the dock, as well as defendants who have fled justice,” he said.

A judicial source, speaking to AFP on condition of anonymity, said the proceedings marked the beginning of preparations for the trials of Assad, his brother and other prominent figures like Najib.

Najib, who was arrested in January 2025 in the aftermath of the collapse of the Assad government, appeared in court in Damascus in a striped prison jersey.

He previously headed Syria’s political security branch in the southern province of Daraa, where Syria’s 2011 uprising first erupted.

He is accused of leading a broad campaign of repression and arrests there.

Syria’s 13-year civil war killed more than half a million people and displaced millions of others.

Assad’s forces pounded rebel-held areas, including with airstrikes and crude barrel bomb attacks, while tens of thousands of people disappeared, some into the country’s brutal prison system.

Assad fled to Moscow as Islamist-led forces closed in on Damascus in December 2024, ending more than five decades of his family dynasty’s rule.

The judge did not question Najib during yesterday’s session, which was dedicated to “preparatory administrative and legal procedures”, and announced that a second hearing would be held on May 10.

The judicial source said in-person trials will include Wassim al-Assad, another relative of the ousted president, former grand mufti Ahmed Badreddin Hassoun, as well as military and security officials arrested by the new authorities in recent months.

Syria’s new authorities have repeatedly vowed to provide justice and accountability for Assad-era atrocities. – AFP



The former head of political security in south Syria’s Daraa province, Atif Najib, attends his first trial session at the Palace of Justice, in Damascus yesterday. – AFP

Fatah leading in West Bank municipal elections

RAMALLAH – Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas’s Fatah movement was on track to lead municipal councils in several major West Bank cities, official election results showed yesterday, with about 95 percent of ballots counted.

On Saturday, Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and in central Gaza’s Deir el-Balah area voted for municipal councils in the first elections since the Gaza war began.

Fatah’s official electoral list, dubbed “Steadfastness & Giving”, was ahead in Hebron, the West Bank’s largest city, as well as in Tulkarem and Salfit, according to the Palestinian Central Elections Commission (CEC).

Speaking at a press conference announcing the results, Palestinian prime minister Mohammad Mustafa described the vote as “an expression of the national will of the Palestinian people”.

He also welcomed the inclusion of Deir el-Balah in the local elections, calling it “a first step toward a more inclusive national framework... until we reach unity in all of Palestine”.

In several important cities such as Ramallah, the seat of Palestinian Authority (PA), and Nablus in the north, no vote was held.

In both of those cases, only a single list was registered, either affiliated with or dominated by Fatah, making elections unnecessary.

In Jenin, a northern West Bank city long associated with armed resistance to Israeli occupation, Fatah won six of the 15 available seats, tying with an independent list also named “Jenin”.

Footage on social media showed groups of young men celebrating in the city centre, chanting slogans linked to local armed factions, interpreting the outcome as a setback for Fatah.

In the city of Qalqilyah, no list was registered, leaving the PA in charge of appointing a municipal council.

Across the West Bank, voter participation reached 53.4 percent, with elections held in 183 municipalities.

But in Deir el-Balah the voter turnout was significantly lower,

with 22.7 percent of the 70,000 registered voters casting ballots.

Most West Bank candidates ran on Fatah-aligned lists or as independents, some of whom were also loosely connected to the secular-nationalist Palestinian movement.

Fatah’s main rival, Hamas, which still controls around half of the Gaza Strip, did not participate in the elections.

Palestinian city and village councils are responsible for essential services such as water, sanitation and local infrastructure, but they do not have legislative authority.

With no presidential or legislative elections held since 2006, voting for local councils has become one

of the last remaining democratic mechanisms under the PA.

Many voters told AFP that municipal governance is increasingly tied to larger political realities, particularly Israeli settlement expansion in the West Bank, which Israel has occupied since 1967.

They pointed to worsening access to water, roads and basic services as settlements – considered illegal under international law – spread across the West Bank.

In 2025, the Israeli military installed around 1,000 gates at the entrances of towns and villages which, when closed, cut off residents from access to services they rely on in nearby larger municipalities. – AFP

Gunman seeks to kill Trump, cabinet at gala dinner

WASHINGTON, DC – Investigators yesterday said the gunman who tried to storm a gala dinner attended by Donald Trump planned to assassinate the US president and other top officials, as scrutiny grew over the event's security.

Trump, who was rushed out of the hotel ballroom in Washington by Secret Service agents, posted surveillance footage of the gunman attempting to sprint past a security checkpoint.

After a brief exchange of gunfire with agents, the suspect was detained at the scene and was being questioned yesterday before he is due to appear in court today.

Trump shared photos of the suspect handcuffed on the carpeted hotel floor.

"He's not actively cooperating. I expect that he will be formally charged tomorrow [Monday] morning in federal court in Washington," acting US Attorney General Todd Blanche told CBS's "Face The Nation" yesterday.

"We do believe, based upon just a very preliminary start to understanding what happened, that he was targeting members of the administration."

Blanche added no further motive was known for the attack, confirming the suspect – who was armed with a shotgun, handgun and knives – was staying at the Washington Hilton hotel where the black-tie dinner was held on Saturday evening (local time).

"We believe that he travelled by train from Los Angeles to



US President Donald Trump takes questions during a press briefing in the Brady Briefing Room at the White House in Washington, DC, shortly after a shooting incident at the White House Correspondents' Dinner on Saturday.

– AFP



US President Donald Trump (centre) takes questions during a press briefing in the Brady Briefing Room at the White House in Washington, DC, shortly after a shooting incident at the White House Correspondents' Dinner on Saturday.

– AFP

Chicago, and then from Chicago to Washington," Blanche said. "It appears he purchased these firearms in the past couple years."

Suspect stayed at hotel venue

Trump, without providing details, said the gunman had written an "anti-Christian" manifesto.

"The guy is a sick guy," Trump told Fox News. "His sister or his brother actually was complaining about it. They were even complaining to law enforcement."

The New York Post said the suspect, widely named as Cole Allen, 31, had written in a note shared with his family shortly before the attack that his targets would be "prioritised from highest-ranking to lowest."

In the seconds after the clash a floor above, Secret Service

agents swarmed into the ballroom, prompting chaotic scenes as attendees dove under tables.

Crowded into the ballroom were Trump, First Lady Melania Trump, Vice President JD Vance, several cabinet members and top lawmakers, and hundreds of guests in black tie.

Trump said at a hastily arranged late-night news conference at the White House that he first thought the noise was a tray being dropped, before realising it was gunfire.

He said he hoped the annual gala, hosted by the White House Correspondents Association, would be rescheduled within a month.

"They seem to think he was a lone wolf, and I feel that too," the president said. One officer was shot at close range in his safety vest and appeared to be not seriously harmed.

Trump added that the hotel venue was "not a particularly secure" facility, as questions swirled about the president's safety protocols.

Multiple attempts on Trump's life

Trump was the target of an assassination attempt during a rally in Butler, Pennsylvania in 2024. A gunman fired several shots, killing an audience member and lightly wounding the president in the ear.

A few months later, another man was arrested after a Secret Service agent saw the barrel of a rifle poking from the bushes on the perimeter of the West Palm Beach golf course where Trump was playing a round.

The Washington Hilton where Saturday's gala was taking place was the site where Republican President Ronald Reagan was shot

by a would-be assassin in 1981.

Trump said the shooting underlined the security reasons that he has cited for planning a huge new ballroom next to the White House that has faced legal challenges.

The White House Correspondents' Association invited Trump to its gala this year despite his repeated attacks on the media.

Before this year and unlike all other presidents from the past 100 years, Trump had never attended while in office.

The dinner brings together journalists and the who's who of Washington to raise funds for scholarships and awards.

The incident late Saturday came less than 48 hours before King Charles III and Queen Camilla begin a four-day state visit to Washington.

– AFP

Trump says shooting proves need for his White House ballroom

WASHINGTON, DC – US President Donald Trump yesterday used a shooting at a gala he attended in Washington to push his plans to construct a huge ballroom next to the White House that has faced legal challenges.

Shots were fired on Saturday evening as Secret Service agents subdued the gunman who tried to storm the White House Correspondents Dinner, attended by Trump, top government officials and hundreds of journalists.

The annual event – a private, not government, function – was at the Washington Hilton, a few blocks north of the White House, where it has been held for decades.

"What happened last night is exactly the reason that our great Military, Secret Service, Law Enforcement and, for different reasons, every President for the last 150 years, have been DEMANDING that a large, safe, and secure Ballroom be built ON THE GROUNDS OF THE WHITE HOUSE," Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform.

The US\$400-million ballroom has become a passion

project for Trump during his second term and he has addressed it often in public appearances, press conferences and meetings.

In his post yesterday, Trump lauded the security features of the proposed ballroom, which has faced widespread public criticism for its outsized scale and the lack of consultation.

"This event would never have happened with the Military Top Secret Ballroom currently under construction at the White House," Trump wrote. "It cannot be built fast enough! While beautiful, it has every highest level security feature there is."

Trump also mentioned the ballroom during a hastily called press conference on Saturday evening after the shooting, and many of his political and online allies voiced support for its construction.

The future of the project, which has already seen the historic East Wing of the White House abruptly torn down, is being fought over in the courts.

The street outside the Washington Hilton was also the site of the 1981 assassination attempt on former president Ronald Reagan.

– AFP

Suspect in US press gala shooting – what we know

WASHINGTON, DC – The suspected attacker in the shooting that plunged a press gala attended by US President Donald Trump into chaos has been identified by news media as a 31-year-old California man.

Just hours after the incident, Trump shared a photo of the suspect handcuffed and face down on the carpeted floor of the Washington Hilton, a floor above where over 2,000 guests had gathered for the annual White House Correspondents' Dinner.

The man with brown hair and a moustache was identified via law enforcement sources as Cole Tomas Allen, 31, from Torrance, California.

A LinkedIn profile with that name and a photo appearing to match the suspect said he was a "mechanical engineer and computer scientist by degree, independent game developer by experience, teacher by birth."

It listed an undergraduate degree from the California Institute of Technology. The university confirmed to AFP in a statement that a person named Cole Allen graduated in 2017.

He was part of the Caltech Christian Fellowship and Nerf Club, according to his profile.

In a phone interview with Fox News yesterday, Trump described the suspect a "sick guy."

"He had a lot of hatred in his heart for quite a while," he said.

The president said the gunman, who attempted to rush past security guards and exchanged fire with

agents before being subdued, had left a manifesto.

Trump described the manifesto as "strongly anti-Christian," without providing details.

The *New York Post* reported that Allen had sent a note to his family shortly ahead of the attack, which they provided to investigators.

Excerpts of the message, which the *New York Post* said was obtained from an unnamed US official, expressed outrage at Trump and his administration, and that the shooter planned to target officials "from highest-ranking to lowest."

It included apparent references to civilian deaths in the war against Iran, the president's immigration crackdown and the scandal surrounding late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

"I'm not a schoolkid blown up, or a child starved, or a teenage girl abused by the many criminals in this administration. Turning the other cheek when *someone else* is oppressed is not Christian behaviour; it is complicity in the oppressor's crimes," the note reportedly said.

It was signed "Cole 'coldForce' 'Friendly Federal Assassin' Allen," the *New York Post* said.

A profile named "coldforce" on the BlueSky platform, which was taken offline yesterday but catalogued by the Internet Archive, showed frequent posts expressing outrage at the Trump administration.

Suburban residence

The suspect is due to be arraigned in court today on firearm and assault charges, officials said.

Authorities said he was armed with a shotgun, a handgun and multiple knives.

"My impression is he was a lone wolf," Trump said at a press conference late Saturday.

FBI tactical agents were seen entering a gabled two-story residence in Torrance associated with the suspect on Saturday evening, according to an AFP photographer.

The brown house in the southwestern Los Angeles suburb was cordoned off, glowing red and blue under flashing police lights.

A neighbour told CNN that he saw Allen recently at the property.

Last year, Allen uploaded a picture wearing a graduation gown and cap, saying he was "done" with his computer science master's degree from California State University Dominguez Hills.

Allen also posted about an indie game he developed called "Bohrdom," described as a "skill-based, non-violent" fighting game "derived from a chemistry model that is itself loosely based on reality."

On his LinkedIn, he said he was also a part-time teacher at a tutoring company called C2 Education.

The test-prep firm named Allen as "teacher of the month" in an Instagram post dated December 2024.

– AFP

Concern stirs Lula camp as election bid loses momentum

Ramon Sahmkow

BRASÍLIA – Four months ago, the stars seemed to be aligned for veteran left-winger Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in his quest for an unprecedented fourth term as Brazilian president.

The 80-year-old was riding high in polls after staring down US President Donald Trump in a spat over the coup trial of former far-right president Jair Bolsonaro.

The economy was growing and unemployment was falling to record lows.

But a flurry of financial scandals and growing discontent over a cost-of-living crisis have eroded his lead over his right-wing rival, Flávio Bolsonaro, son of Jair Bolsonaro, now sitting in prison.

A survey by the polling firm Datafolha published on April 11 sent alarm bells ringing throughout the Lula camp.

For the first time it showed Bolsonaro edging out the incumbent in a presidential runoff, with the senator garnering 46 percent to 45 percent for Lula, although the pair remained locked in a statistical tie.

Worryingly for Lula, the Datafolha poll showed 51 percent of voters disapproving of his performance.

“It’s a warning sign, obviously,” said Jilmar Tatto, vice president of the Workers’ Party (PT), which former metalworker Lula co-founded in 1980.

The younger Bolsonaro is running as a more moderate version of his father, who is serving a 27-year sentence for plotting to cling onto power after losing elections to Lula in 2022.

Lula has launched a counteroffensive, highlighting improvements in health, education, and infrastructure since he succeeded Trump ally Bolsonaro.

The publicity effort is taking place on several fronts.

To allay concerns about his age, Lula has released videos of him lifting weights, using a treadmill and sprinting to meetings.

He has also issued a new call to arms in the face of Trump’s intimidation of friend and foe alike.

“We cannot allow the world to bow down to the behaviour of a president who believes that he can impose tariffs on products, punish countries, and wage war by email



Portuguese President António José Seguro (right) shakes hands with his Brazilian counterpart Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva at Belém Palace in Lisbon moments before their meeting last Tuesday. – AFP

or Twitter,” Lula said recently in Germany.

‘Barely surviving’

Defending Brazil’s sovereignty gave Lula a poll bump last year, when the United States slapped tariffs on its longtime ally for putting Trump’s friend Bolsonaro in prison.

But in the months since, the mood in Brazil has shifted.

Rising prices for essentials like food and energy have taken centre stage, particularly among younger voters.

“The market is incredibly expensive. Buying clothes is very expensive too. It’s very shocking because you’re not really living, you’re just barely surviving,” Yohana Freitas Barbosa, a 27-year-old administrative assistant in the capital Brasília, told AFP.

Mariano Machado, an analyst at the consulting firm Verisk Maplecroft, warned that “any gap between the macroeconomic situation and voters’ everyday experience with the cost of living will influence the vote, and Lula knows it.”

To curb rising fuel prices caused by the Middle East war, the government has temporarily reduced taxes on diesel to zero.

But Lula has failed to quell feverish speculation about his poll slump.

For the first time, newspaper columnists are pondering a hypothetical scenario in which he might withdraw from the election.

The ruling party has dismissed

the idea and doubled down on its social agenda, which includes a proposal to cut the working week by four hours to 40 total.

“We are going to set the country’s agenda and win the elections,” Tatto said.

Whiff of scandal

A series of high-profile financial scandals have added to the president’s woes.

Police and Congress are investigating a major alleged pension fraud scheme, from which one of Lula’s sons is believed to have benefited.

Another probe is looking at the links between a businessman at the heart of a major banking scandal and high-ranking public officials.

While none of the investigations target the president, Brazilians’ weariness with corruption “ends up tainting those in power,” Edinho Silva, head of the Workers’ Party, lamented.

For many on the right, Lula remains poisoned by the corruption scandals that marked his first two terms as leader between 2003 and 2010.

Lula himself spent 580 days in prison for corruption as part of the sprawling Lava Jato (“Car Wash”) probe, although his convictions were later annulled.

The lingering perception among some voters is “that the [Workers’ Party] is more corrupt than the rest,” Creomar de Souza, a politics professor at the Dom Cabral Foundation, told AFP. – AFP

Spain is ‘reliable’ NATO member, PM says after reported US ouster threat

NICOSIA – Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez on Friday stressed Spain was a “reliable member” of NATO, after a report the United States was considering trying to suspend it over its refusal to support military operations against Iran.

The Reuters newswire cited an anonymous US official as telling it that the Pentagon had outlined the suspension option in an email looking at ways to punish NATO allies that steered clear of the US-Israeli war against Iran.

The same email also suggested the United States could review its position on the Falkland Islands in retaliation for UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s lack of support in the war.

“Spain is a reliable member within NATO” which is fulfilling all its obligations, Sánchez told reporters in English during a visit to Cyprus for an EU summit.

“As a result, I am absolutely not worried,” he said.

The Socialist leader added in Spanish: “We don’t work on the basis of emails, we work off official documents and the position that the United States government has set out in this case.”

There is no provision in the NATO treaty allowing for the suspension or expulsion of a member of the world’s most powerful military alliance.

Responding to a question about the Reuters report, Pentagon Press Secretary Kingsley Wilson said the Defence Department “will ensure that the president has credible options to ensure that our allies are no longer a paper tiger and instead do their part,” but did not provide further details.

‘NATO must remain united’

US President Donald Trump has repeatedly railed against NATO allies for refusing to join the war that engulfed the Middle East, saying he viewed it as a betrayal.

Some of them – France, Spain and Italy – did not allow US military aircraft deployed for the war to overfly their territories or to use bases.

Trump had also tried, in vain, to get European NATO members to send warships to the Strait of Hormuz, the key waterway for Gulf energy exports, which Iran has effectively closed with military threats and attacks.

Washington’s expectation that NATO members’ facilities and territories should be available to the United States without question has added to strains within the alliance.

Sánchez said his government’s stance was “absolute cooperation with allies, but always within the bounds of international law”.

Sánchez has repeatedly found himself in Trump’s crosshairs since the Republican president returned to office in January 2025.

Last year, he refused to agree to ramp up NATO defence spending to five percent of GDP as demanded by Trump, who then suggested expelling Spain from the alliance.

Sánchez condemned the US military intervention in Venezuela on January 3 that captured the South American country’s socialist president Nicolás Maduro and is a strong critic of Washington’s ally Israel.

NATO is to hold its next summit in Turkey on July 7-8.

– AFP

US allows Venezuela to pay for Maduro legal team

NEW YORK – The United States will allow Venezuela to pay for Nicolás Maduro’s legal defence, a court filing showed, lifting a roadblock on the ousted leader’s trial on drug and other charges in New York.

US Treasury sanctions on Venezuela had previously blocked Venezuela – now ruled by Maduro’s deputy – from sending funds to pay for attorneys to represent the leftist strongman and his wife.

Both were snatched by US forces in an overnight raid in early January and flown to New York to face federal criminal charges.

The Maduros’ defence had sought to have their cases dismissed on grounds that blocking the funding violated the US Constitution’s right to counsel of one’s choice.

A court filing on Friday by the US prosecutor in New York said the Treasury’s “Office of Foreign Assets Control has issued amended licences to counsel for

defendants” that authorises them to “receive payments from the Government of Venezuela.”

The funds must have been made available after March 5, 2026, and cannot come from Venezuela’s US-regulated oil sales.

Since removing Maduro in early January, the United States has effectively controlled the export of Venezuelan oil, with the funds going into special accounts overseen by Washington.

According to the Friday filing, the defence acknowledges the sanctions waiver and is lifting its motion to dismiss the charges, for now.

Maduro has declared himself a “prisoner of war” and pleaded not guilty to the four counts he faces: “narco-terrorism” conspiracy, cocaine importation conspiracy, possession of machine guns and destructive devices and conspiracy to possess machine guns and destructive devices. – AFP

Lula has surgery to remove skin lesion from scalp

SÃO PAULO – Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva underwent surgery on Friday that removed a lesion on his scalp, less than six months before the presidential elections.

The lesion – clearly visible in recent weeks – was a basal cell carcinoma, a type of skin cancer, said dermatologist Cristina Abdalla, who led the procedure at the Sírio-Libanês Hospital in São Paulo.

“It is a common lesion, caused by sun exposure,” Abdalla said.

Lula, 80, left the hospital shortly before noon, his office said.

Cardiologist Roberto Kalil Filho told reporters at the hospital that the surgery proceeded “without any complications” and healing will take about one month.

Lula was also given an injection in his right wrist to treat tendinitis in his thumb.

“He should not participate in large-scale events over the coming days, but this will not impact his schedule for next week,” Kalil Filho said.

Lula plans to run for a fourth term as president in October elections, where he is likely to face Senator Flávio Bolsonaro, 44, the eldest son of imprisoned far-right former president Jair Bolsonaro.

– AFP



Arsenal back on top of Premier League, Spurs win

John Weaver

LONDON – Eberechi Eze fired Arsenal back to the top of the Premier League on Saturday as relegation-threatened Tottenham won for the first time in 2026 to give themselves renewed hope.

The Gunners were nine points clear of Manchester City just two weeks ago before defeats against Bournemouth and City allowed their rivals to edge ahead of them.

Saturday's home game against Newcastle was a must-win for Arsenal, with Pep Guardiola's team involved in an FA Cup semi-final against Southampton, which they won to stay on track for a domestic treble.

Before the Gunners kicked off on Saturday, the two title contenders were locked on 70 points each, with an identical goal difference. City topped the table on goals scored.

England midfielder Eze eased the pressure on Arsenal with an early goal, arrowing home from outside the box after being teed up by Kai Havertz and the game finished 1-0.

It was a 16th league defeat of a dispiriting season for Newcastle.

"We had the necessity to win the game, the margins are very short, and we got through it," Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta told Sky Sports.

"There were moments in the first half and second. We certainly had discipline, courage and great habits defensively, but with the ball, there are habits we have to do much better if we want to be more dominant in the game."

Arsenal could increase their advantage over City to six points before the Blues play again, when they face Fulham next week.



Newcastle United's English goalkeeper Nick Pope dives but concedes the opening goal from Arsenal's English midfielder Eberechi Eze (unseen) during the English Premier League match between Arsenal and Newcastle United at the Emirates Stadium in London on Saturday. – AFP

The Gunners are desperate to shed their reputation as perpetual runners-up as they chase a first Premier League title since 2004.

But they are up against a City juggernaut relentlessly hunting a seventh league title in nine seasons.

Relegation dogfight

Earlier, the focus was on the other end of the table, where Spurs and West Ham are locked in a dramatic relegation battle, with Wolves and Burnley already down.

Spurs looked set to escape the bottom three

after Joao Palhinha's late goal at Wolves and Everton's equaliser at the London Stadium.

But West Ham substitute Callum Wilson scored a 92nd-minute winner to seal a 2-1 victory and restore his side's two-point cushion, with just four games to go.

Roberto De Zerbi celebrated his first triumph as Tottenham head coach after replacing interim boss Igor Tudor earlier this month.

"We have to believe and to stay up and to win the games because we have the quality to win the games," he told Sky Sports after his side's 1-0 victory.

Football shorts

Como beat Genoa to keep up Champions League bid

MILAN – Como kept up their bid for Champions League football by winning 2-0 at Genoa yesterday and putting pressure on Juventus in the race for a top four finish in Serie A.

Headed goals in each half from Tasos Douvikas and Assane Diao gave Como a deserved victory at the Stadio Luigi Ferraris and moved the ambitious lakeside outfit back into fifth, two points behind fourth-placed Juve.

Juventus faced AC Milan at the San Siro in yesterday's headline fixture, with both teams trying to secure a place in Europe's elite club competition.

The pressure will be on Juve as Roma, in sixth, are level on 61 points with Como whose win was a return to form after a difficult few weeks.

Cesc Fabregas' team were at one point favourites for the final Champions League spot but a single point from their previous three matches allowed Juve to sneak in.

Como, who have never played in European competition, also suffered a painful elimination from the Italian Cup at the hands of Inter Milan on Tuesday.

Later, Inter can take another step towards the Serie A title with a win at mid-table Torino. – AFP

Stuttgart stumble against Bremen in top-four race

BERLIN – Stuttgart were held to a 1-1 draw at home by Werder Bremen yesterday, denting their hopes of a return to the Champions League.

Stuttgart's top-four rivals RB Leipzig, Hoffenheim and Bayer Leverkusen all won this weekend to up the pressure on the German Cup holders.

Bremen's Jens Stage continued his rich run of form, putting the visitors ahead early before Ermedin Demirovic levelled four minutes after coming on in the second half.

Stuttgart sit in fourth place with three games remaining. They are level on points

with Hoffenheim but ahead on goal difference, while Leverkusen are lurking two points behind.

Stuttgart still have to play Hoffenheim and Leverkusen, as well as Frankfurt.

Bremen's first point this season against a side currently in the top five left them six points clear of St Pauli, who are in the relegation play-off spot.

Stuttgart's exertions in Thursday's extra-time German Cup semi-final victory over Freiburg were clear early as Stage and Senne Lynen glided through the hosts' sluggish defence.

Dane Stage put Bremen in front after 18 minutes, hitting a low first-time shot into the bottom corner after a clever one-two with Yukinari Sugawara.

The goal was Stage's 10th this season and his third in two games.

Bremen were the better side in the opening half but the hosts wrestled back control of the game after half-time.

Substitute Demirovic headed in a floating Bilal El Khannouss cross to cancel out Bremen's advantage just after the hour mark. – AFP

Atletico's Barrios to miss Arsenal tie with thigh injury

MADRID – Atletico Madrid midfielder Pablo Barrios is set to miss the Champions League semi-final tie against Arsenal after his club said yesterday he sustained a thigh injury.

"Barrios has suffered a muscular injury in his left thigh, which occurred during the match against Athletic Bilbao this Saturday," said Atletico in a statement, without specifying how long he is expected to miss.

Spanish media reported the injury will keep the 22-year-old out for a month, a blow for Diego Simeone's side ahead of Wednesday's first leg clash against Arsenal at the Metropolitano stadium.

After defeat in last weekend's Copa del Rey final the Champions League represents Atletico's last hope of silverware this season. – AFP

Al Ahli made to 'suffer' in winning Asian Champions League: coach



JEDDAH – Al Ahli had to "suffer" in becoming the first club in more than two decades to win back-to-back Asian Champions League titles, their relieved coach said.

The Saudi side, playing at home in Jeddah, had a man sent off before overcoming Japan's stubborn Machida Zelvia 1-0 in extra time on Saturday.

The defending champions retained the trophy thanks to substitute Feras Al Buraikan's 96th-minute goal in front of 58,984 at King Abdullah Sports City Stadium.

Al Ahli had been reduced to 10 men midway through the second half when defender Zakaria Hawsawi was shown a straight red card for violent conduct for a headbutt.

"We had opportunities to score but it became harder after Hawsawi was sent off for an unnecessary action," their German coach Matthias Jaissle said, according to the Asian Football Confederation (AFC).

"But we showed the right mentality

and the players kept believing and that makes me so proud as a coach.

"We talked about it at the break that with a man down we had to suffer more and work harder. However, we have quality players who can make one moment count."

Jaissle admitted that playing as hosts in front of a home crowd roaring them on had been significant.

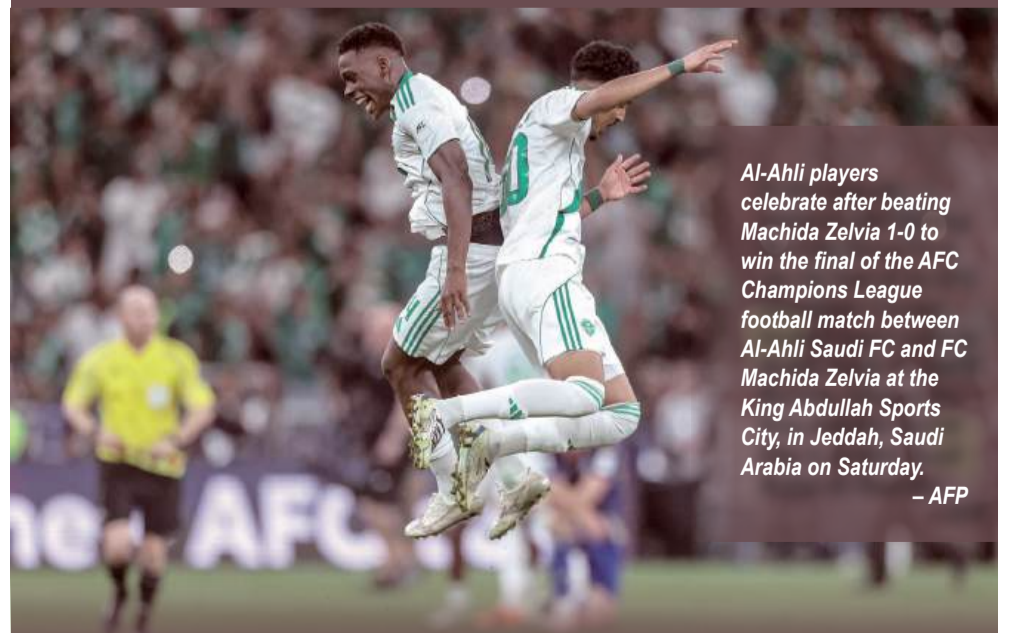
The AFC put the latter rounds of Asia's top club competition in Jeddah, handing Jeddah-based Al Ahli a clear advantage.

"Obviously a part of it (winning) was because we played here in Jeddah in front of our fans who pushed us and gave us extra energy," he said.

"To win it back to back is something historic.

"Feels a bit weird. My tank is a bit empty. So much relief because the pressure was on.

"It will take a couple of days for this to sink in." – AFP



Al-Ahli players celebrate after beating Machida Zelvia 1-0 to win the final of the AFC Champions League football match between Al-Ahli Saudi FC and FC Machida Zelvia at the King Abdullah Sports City, in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia on Saturday. – AFP

History-maker Sawe shatters marathon glass ceiling

Marathon

LONDON – Kenya's Sebastian Sawe yesterday shattered one of the most elusive barriers in athletics, becoming the first man to dip below the two-hour mark in the marathon.

Sawe, sporting state-of-the-art running shoes and spurred on by second-placed Yomif Kejelcha of Ethiopia, clocked a barely believable 1hr 59min 30sec to retain his London crown.

It shattered by 65 seconds the previous best of 2:00:35 set in Chicago in 2023 by the late Kelvin Kiptum.

"The goalposts have literally just moved for marathon running and where you benchmark yourself as being world class," said BBC pundit Paula Radcliffe, who held the women's marathon record of

2:15:25 from 2003 to 2019.

"I did think that mark could be beaten but not today.

"It is a lesson to everybody out there. We say don't go out too fast and they went out smartly and paced it really well. Smart racing brought it to the line."

The two-hour barrier has long been a goal of increasing numbers of elite marathon runners, not least Kenya's Eliud Kipchoge.

In October 2019, Kipchoge famously broke that barrier as he timed 1:59:40 on the streets of Vienna.

But the time was not ratified as a world record because he ran with specialised shoes, standard competition rules for pacing and fluids were not followed, and it was not an open event.

Kenyan Paul Tergat's time of

2:04:55 in the 2003 Berlin Marathon was the first ratified world record over the 26.2-mile (42.2-km) distance.

Ethiopian Haile Gebrselassie twice bettered that mark, both times in Berlin, dipping under 2:04:00.

The record then swung back into Kenyan hands, first with Patrick Makau and then Wilson Kipsang and Dennis Kimetto setting new marks.

Kipchoge then set new standards, again in Berlin, in 2018 and then 2022. Kiptum rose to prominence a year later before his tragic death in 2024.

'Unbelievable'

Kipchoge was quick to praise Sawe, posting a photo of the London winner along with one of himself in the 2019 Vienna challenge on social media.

"Today is a historical day for marathon running!" Kipchoge said.

"Breaking the sub-two-hour barrier in the marathon has long been a dream for runners everywhere, and today, you've made that dream come true."

Seeing Sawe and Kejelcha both dip under two hours, Kipchoge added, was "proof that we are just at the beginning of what is possible when talent, progress and an unwavering belief in the human potential come together".

Sawe's performance left BBC commentator Steve Cram, a former world 1,500m world champion, in awe, especially after his training only started properly in January after an injury lay-off.

"The question marks were still here and he had a great field against him," said Cram.

"Absolutely incredible, I've never seen anything like that. What a finish. You would say that is unbelievable but we've just seen it."

The understated Sawe said it was a day to remember.

"To break the world record is something I have dreamed about for a long time, and to achieve it means so much to me and to the sport of running," he said.

"It reflects the hard work behind

the scenes, the support of my team, and the role of innovation in helping me push beyond limits. I'm honoured to be part of a new chapter for the sport."

Sawe has been an outspoken advocate of doping tests in his homeland.

Kenya worked to clean up its image after a string of doping scandals around the 2016 Rio Olympics led to the nation being declared non-compliant by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA).

More than 140 Kenyan runners, mainly long-distance athletes, have been sanctioned for drugs offences since then.

Sawe was prominent in calling on the Kenyan government, Kenya's Anti-Doping Agency and WADA to work fast.

"WADA would not make an issue on the doping failings in Kenya if everything was OK. I feel it is time we combat doping, which has been something like cancer, to save our nation," Sawe previously told AFP.

Sawe has worked to ensure confidence in his own performances by undergoing frequent drug tests and was tested 25 times before competing in last year's Berlin Marathon, according to the BBC.

– AFP



Second place, Ethiopia's Yomif Kejelcha (left), winner, Kenya's Sebastian Sawe (centre) and third place, Uganda's Jacob Kiplimo pose with their trophies at the presentation ceremony for the men's elite race at the 2026 London Marathon in central London yesterday.

– AFP



China takes 4 golds from 3 events at Asian Beach Games

SANYA – China took four gold medals in beach athletics, open water swimming and dragon boat racing at the ongoing Asian Beach Games here yesterday.

Marathon swimming specialist Zhang Ziyang won the men's 5km title in 53 minutes and 46.0 seconds, with Nguyen Huy Hoang and Mai Tran Tuan Anh of Vietnam finishing second and third.

"The 5km is shorter than the 10km, so the pace is much faster and the racing is more intense, I chose to go to the front from the first lap and tried to hold it to the end, which really tested my fitness and race management. It was a valuable experience for my future 10km races," said Zhang.

In beach athletics, China pocketed gold in the men's 4x60m relay final in the closing part of the event. Chinese sprinters Huang

Youchao, Li Mengyuan, Wang Xinkai and Ailikuti Yishake crossed the line first in 26.06 seconds. Thailand took silver in 26.68, with Sri Lanka third in 27.57.

"We united as one and cooperated perfectly on the track, that's the key to our victory," Wang told Xinhua.

In the women's high jump, Barnokhon Sayfullaeva of Uzbekistan won the title with a leap of 1.85 meters. The 21-year-old cleared 1.70, 1.75, 1.78 and 1.81 at her first attempt, then, after a first failure at 1.83, composed herself to go over 1.83 and 1.85 in succession. China's Shao Yuqi, champion at the 15th National Games, and Hu Linpeng shared second place at 1.83.

In the men's shot put, Iran's Hassan Ajamibakhtiarvand took gold with a final-round throw of 20.17m, a personal best. China's

Chen Chengyu claimed silver with 19.95m and teammate Zhang Haochen took bronze with 19.69m.

In the women's 4x60m relay, Thailand stormed to victory in 29.46 seconds. The Philippines finished second in 29.73, while China ranked third in 30.42s.

In the dragon boat competition, China won the women's 400m grand final in one minute and 48.899 seconds, with Thailand, Vietnam and Macao finishing second to fourth. In the men's event, China also took gold in one minute and 34.990 seconds, while Thailand and Hong Kong claimed silver and bronze, respectively.

On day 5, open water swimming, teqball and beach kabaddi of the Asian Beach Games will be concluded with six gold medals on offer.

– Xinhua

Photos on page 16

2026海南·三亚 第六届亚洲沙滩运动会 SANYA HAINAN 2026 6th Asian Beach Games		MEDAL TABLE			
Rank	NOC				Total
1	China	13	11	4	28
2	Thailand	4	5	3	12
3	Philippines	3	2	2	7
4	Viet Nam	2	2	4	8
5	United Arab Emirates	2	2	2	6
6	Republic of Korea	1	3	2	6
7	Kazakhstan	1	1	3	5
8	Islamic Republic of Iran	1	0	0	1
8	Uzbekistan	1	0	0	1
10	Chinese Taipei	0	1	4	5
11	Sri Lanka	0	1	3	4
12	Hong Kong, China	0	1	1	2
13	Cambodia	0	1	0	1
14	Mongolia	0	0	2	2
15	Japan	0	0	1	1
15	Saudi Arabia	0	0	1	1

YouTube offers deepfake detection to Hollywood

Anuj Chopra

WASHINGTON, DC – YouTube is offering Hollywood celebrities and entertainers a free detection tool to help combat their deepfakes, expanding the Google-owned video platform's efforts to guard against AI-driven impersonations.

Last month, YouTube introduced its likeness protection tool – which helps identify content in which a person's face appears altered or generated using AI technology – to government officials, journalists, and political candidates.

The platform is now extending access to entertainers including actors and musicians, who face a heightened risk of having their likeness misused – potentially harming their careers and distorting shared realities.

"We're expanding our likeness detection technology to the entertainment industry: talent agencies, management companies, and the celebrities they represent," YouTube said earlier this week.

Liikeness detection "looks for AI-generated content with a participant's likeness, like a deepfake of their face, and gives them the power to find it and request removal."

The video giant added that celebrities and entertainers were eligible to access the tool regardless of whether they have a YouTube channel.

"YouTube opening its deepfake detection capabilities to public figures reflects a turning point in how platforms approach identity protection in the age of generative AI," Alon Yamin, chief executive and co-founder of AI content detection platform Copyleaks, told AFP.

"The technology to replicate a person's face, voice, and mannerisms has advanced faster than the safeguards around it, creating a gap that bad actors are already exploiting."

High stakes

The move comes after hyper-realistic AI videos of dead celebrities – created with apps such as OpenAI's easy-to-use Sora – rapidly spread online, prompting debate over the control of deceased people's likenesses.

OpenAI's app also unleashed a flood of videos of celebrities such as Michael Jackson and Elvis Presley.

Last month, OpenAI said it was shutting down its Sora app.

In February, Irish director Ruairi Robinson created a stunningly realistic clip featuring Brad Pitt fighting Tom Cruise on a rooftop using a two-sentence prompt.

The widely circulated clip, which sparked alarm across Hollywood, was generated with Seedance 2.0, an AI video generation tool owned by the Chinese technology company ByteDance.

Robinson also created other videos depicting Pitt battling a sword-wielding "zombie ninja," and another showing him teaming up with Cruise to fight a robot.

Charles Rivkin, the chairman and chief executive of the Motion Picture Association, called on ByteDance to "immediately cease its infringing activity," accusing it of disregarding copyright law that protects creators and underpins millions of jobs.

YouTube said it was working with leading talent agencies to refine how likeness detection can protect entertainers.

The video giant is "doing the right thing by providing these tools at no cost to the talent, so they can protect their real estate," Jason Newman of the management and production firm Untitled Entertainment told *The Hollywood Reporter*.

"Their real estate is their face. Their real estate is their body. Their real estate is who they are, what they do, how they say it."

The expansion of the detection tool follows complaints from high-profile Americans about YouTube's cumbersome process for flagging and removing deepfakes from the platform – especially as AI accelerates the creation of fabricated content.

"For celebrities, executives, and other high-profile individuals, the stakes are especially high as deepfakes can be used to spread misinformation, manipulate markets, damage reputations, or falsely imply endorsement. Robust detection is no longer optional," said Yamin.

"Detection systems must be highly accurate, continuously updated, and paired with clear policies and swift takedown processes to be effective.

"This won't eliminate deepfakes entirely, but it can significantly reduce their reach and impact by making it harder for manipulated content to go undetected or unchallenged," he added. – AFP

'Godzilla Minus Zero' will show monster up close, director says

Paula Ramon

LAS VEGAS – Godzilla will be closer to audiences than ever before in "Godzilla Minus Zero," the film's Japanese director said.

"I don't think we've ever been able to get this close to Godzilla before," Takashi Yamazaki told AFP in an interview on the sidelines of CinemaCon in Las Vegas earlier this month.

Yamazaki said the legendary monster's roars – as well as the thunderous sound of his footsteps – will reverberate through cinemas in an unprecedented way.

He said this is thanks to advancements in cinematic sound and visual effects in movie theatres, a place he described as Godzilla's natural habitat.

The director – who helmed the 2023 box-office smash "Godzilla Minus One," which earned an Oscar for Best Visual Effects – said bringing audiences back to the cinema is not a matter of personal taste but a responsibility for filmmakers.

"It falls partly on us – the filmmakers – to constantly create new experiences and provide reasons for people to want to go to the movies and spend their time there," he said after presenting a preview of "Godzilla Minus Zero" at the industry's annual convention in Las Vegas.

The new movie, set to hit US cinemas in November, stars Ryunosuke Kamiki and Minami Hamabe, and is set in 1949, two years after the events of "Minus One."

The production centres on the Shikishima family, who, "at the beginning of the film, are truly happy."

"They have finally found a balance in what it means to be a family," Yamazaki said. "And then, once again, they are confronted with utter despair and a horrific tragedy."

The director added that audiences will be able to identify with the sheer effort required to summon the strength to recover and find the will to go on living.



Japanese filmmaker and visual effects supervisor Takashi Yamazaki poses during a photo session during Cinemacon on April 14, 2026 in Las Vegas, Nevada. – AFP

For the 61-year-old filmmaker, taking on a sequel presented specific challenges – chief among them, the task of outdoing himself.

"'Godzilla Minus One' was, fortunately, highly acclaimed and has become one of the most beloved Godzilla films of all time," he said.

"That benchmark has become a new obstacle. Little did I know I was feeding my enemy," added the director.

But the chance to take a second pass at the monster gives him the opportunity to do things he couldn't last time around.

"I wasn't able to do everything with 'Godzilla Minus One,'" said Yamazaki. "So, one of my own new challenges is to put images and visuals on the screen that no one has ever seen before in a kaiju film*."

In the teaser the director presented at CinemaCon, Godzilla is seen face-to-face with the Statue of Liberty in New York.

The image caused a stir in the room, but Yamazaki cautioned that – beyond the expectations the clip generated – "the film will feature Japan much more than people imagine."

"That scene is very important for the character in the film, and it is a very impressive kind of scene," he added.

But "the focus was on the story, and on finding what was best for the narrative."

In the streaming era, Yamazaki also insisted on the importance of the big screen for Godzilla – and how the monster, having been born on it, could only truly be at home when he looms many feet tall on a giant projection.

"I think [Godzilla] really needs to rely on certain experiences that we can only have inside movie theatres," he said. – AFP

*A kaiju film is a subgenre of science fiction and fantasy cinema centered around giant monsters. The term comes from the Japanese word *kaijū* (怪獣), which literally translates to "strange beast." While giant monsters appear in folklore and early cinema worldwide (like the original 1933 *King Kong*), the genre as we know it today was largely defined by Japanese filmmaking in the mid-20th century. The creatures are typically large enough to destroy entire cities, dwarfing skyscrapers and military hardware. Traditional kaiju often serve as metaphors for real-world anxieties. For example, the original 1954 *Godzilla* was a direct allegory for the trauma of the atomic bombings and nuclear testing. *Godzilla* is the "King of the Monsters" and the face of the genre. – Gemini

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 11°C~22°C	Manila 25°C~35°C	New York 8°C~19°C	Lisbon 15°C~27°C
Shanghai 18°C~29°C	Bangkok 27°C~36°C	London 9°C~21°C	Rio de Janeiro 23°C~30°C
Hong Kong 23°C~27°C	Tokyo 11°C~19°C	Frankfurt 9°C~21°C	Luanda 23°C~29°C
Taipei 18°C~30°C	Singapore 24°C~33°C	Vancouver 9°C~15°C	Maputo 21°C~34°C
Guangzhou 21°C~28°C	Kuala Lumpur 24°C~36°C	Paris 9°C~23°C	Dili 24°C~31°C
Nanjing 15°C~27°C	Jakarta 24°C~34°C	Moscow 1°C~4°C	São Tomé 26°C~33°C
Guilin 19°C~25°C	Seoul 13°C~23°C	Las Vegas 11°C~23°C	Praia 18°C~27°C
Xi'an 16°C~26°C	Sydney 13°C~23°C	Monte Carlo 13°C~20°C	Bissau 19°C~36°C



Fans of Colombian singer Shakira learn to dance the choreography of her song "Waka Waka (This Time for Africa)" at the Copacabana promenade, in front of the stage where she will perform in one week, in Rio de Janeiro yesterday. – AFP



Mehdi Yazdankhah (left) of Iran competes with Han Hyomin of South Korea during the water polo men's round-robin final between South Korea and Iran at the 6th Asian Beach Games in Sanya, Hainan Province, yesterday. - Xinhua

Neeraj (centre) of India competes during the Beach Kabaddi men's semifinal match against Pakistan at the 6th Asian Beach Games in Sanya, Hainan Province, yesterday. - Xinhua



Gong Enjian (right) of China shoots during the beach soccer men's group A match against Oman at the 6th Asian Beach Games in Sanya, Hainan Province, yesterday. - Xinhua



Suphawadi Wongkhamchan/Phakpong Dejaroen (left) compete during the teqball mixed doubles semifinal between Suphawadi Wongkhamchan/Phakpong Dejaroen of Thailand and Ko Ko Lwin/Wai Khin Hnin of Myanmar at the 6th Asian Beach Games in Sanya, Hainan Province, yesterday. - Xinhua



Ba Truong Giang (bottom) gets injured during the teqball men's doubles quarterfinal between Mohamad Hafez/Ahmad Kassem Arabi of Lebanon and Ba Truong Giang/Le Anh Khoa of Vietnam at the 6th Asian Beach Games in Sanya, Hainan Province, yesterday. - Xinhua



Players compete during the Beach Kabaddi Women's Team Group B match between Nepal and Bangladesh at the 6th Asian Beach Games in Sanya, Hainan Province, yesterday. - Xinhua