

Govt to provide mosquito repellents at 12 parks & rest areas

Tony Wong

The government has launched a shared mosquito repellent scheme providing repellents at various locations across the city for everybody to use free of charge, encouraging them to use them more often, with the aim of preventing mosquito-borne dengue and chikungunya.

The mosquito repellents are available from today for everybody to use at 12 government-run "Health Fuel Stations", located in different public parks and sitting-out areas, in the daytime between Mondays and Fridays. The government's operation of its various "Health Fuel Stations" started early this year.

The Health Bureau (SSM) announced the provision of shared mosquito repellents during a ceremony on Saturday marking the launch of a citywide awareness campaign for the city's households to strengthen the elimination of stagnant water with the aim of enhancing Macau's ability to prevent dengue and chikungunya.

'Door-to-door' awareness campaign for eliminating stagnant water

The citywide campaign, lasting two weeks, includes "door-to-door" visits to households instructing them how to effectively identify hidden stagnant water spots and eliminate the stagnant water in and around their homes.

The bureau's "door-to-door" awareness campaign for the elimination of stagnant water was launched in August last year for the first time, when Macau was facing a significant threat of being affected by chikungunya



Attendees watch a performance delivering the message of mosquito prevention during Saturday's ceremony at the Areia Preta Health Centre. – Photo: SSM

community transmissions, as the neighbouring Guangdong Province was then affected by an outbreak of chikungunya fever.

In 2025, according to the bureau's data, Macau recorded 46 cases of chikungunya fever, comprising 38 imported and eight local cases, and 36 cases of dengue fever, comprising a local and 35 imported cases.

Addressing Saturday's ceremony, which was held at the Areia Preta Health Centre, SSM Director Alvis Lo Iek Long said that the "door-to-door" awareness campaign this time is "a continuation" from last year's campaign, which, he said, proved to be effective in strengthening residents' awareness of the

elimination of stagnant water.

According to Dr Lo, the ongoing door-to-door visits are being carried out by over 80 volunteers from a number of public entities as well as from various community associations.

Dr Lo also said that the two-week door-to-door visits are specifically targeting households in old residential buildings.

The campaign aims to make the elimination of stagnant water a daily habit for every resident, he said.

Dr Lo noted that with the arrival of summer, increased rainfall and rising temperatures have brought the *Aedes albopictus* mosquito into its peak activity period in Macau.

Between January and April this year, he said, Macau recorded five imported cases of dengue fever and two imported cases of chikungunya fever. Although the seven cases were all imported ones, he said, Macau must not let its guard down in its prevention and control work, as neighbouring regions normally began to record locally transmitted cases of the two ailments in early summer in previous years.

Consequently, it is essential for the local government to make early preparations for the two diseases' potential threats to the city, the health chief said.

Continued on p.5

Boy, 14, stabs man, 22, after blazing row in housing lobby

Tony Wong

A 14-year-old boy attacked a 22-year-old man with a knife following a heated argument in the lobby of a residential building on Saturday night, the Public Security Police (PSP) announced in a statement yesterday.

Both were injured during the incident in the peninsula's Lam Mau Tong district. While the teenager has been discharged from hospital following treatment, the man remains under medical care. His condition was described by the statement as stable.

The police have declined to reveal the cause of the dispute.

According to the statement, officers

received a report of the stabbing at 10:30 p.m. on Saturday. Including the two injured, the incident involved seven residents.

A preliminary investigation revealed that the 14-year-old, armed with a knife, entered the building's lobby looking for a woman. Five others, including the 22-year-old victim, were present at the scene.

An argument subsequently broke out between the boy, the victim, and one of the women there. During the altercation, the teenager allegedly attacked the man with the knife.

Both males were taken to the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre.

Police seized a 30 cm knife with a 17.5 cm blade at the scene.

The PSP have since transferred the case to the Judiciary Police (PJ) and the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) for further investigation.

The Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) told local Chinese-language media yesterday that it was monitoring the case closely. The bureau has instructed counselling organisations to provide support to the boy and his parents.

In a statement, the bureau urged young people to abide by the law and "think twice" before acting on impulse. It also called on parents to remain vigilant regarding their

children's social circles and daily lives.

The bureau underlined its commitment to strengthening Macau's youth protection network through cross-departmental collaboration, early warning systems, and legal education within school curricula and community activities.

As the age of criminal responsibility in Macau is set at 16, the boy is exempt from criminal charges. He may, however, be subject to non-penal measures, including mandatory counselling.

Since its return to the motherland in December 1999, Macau has seen very few instances of stabbings or other violent crimes. ■

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China, US to hold trade talks in S Korea this week

Senior Chinese and US officials will hold talks in South Korea this week, Beijing's commerce ministry and Washington's Treasury secretary said yesterday, ahead of an expected summit between leaders Xi Jinping and Donald Trump. – Story on p. 7

Hantavirus ship evacuees begin returning home

Occupants of a cruise ship struck by a deadly hantavirus outbreak that has sparked international alarm began arriving home from Spain's Canary Islands yesterday in a complex repatriation operation. – Story on p. 11

Lula, Trump hail positive talks after rocky relations

US President Donald Trump and his Brazilian counterpart Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva have hailed a positive three-hour meeting in Washington, as the ideological opposites sought to smooth tensions. – Story on p. 12

Population dips 0.1 pct to 688,100 in Q1

Staff Reporter

Macau's population, comprising residents, non-resident workers, non-local students and others, dipped by 0.11 percent quarter-on-quarter to 688,100 in the first quarter of this year, the Statistics and Census Bureau (DSEC) has announced.

In the fourth quarter of last year, the population stood at 688,900, according to the chart released on Friday.

Year-on-year, the population rose by 0.029 percent, from 687,900 in the first quarter of last year.

Females accounted for 53.93 percent of the population in the first quarter of 2026.

The number of live births fell by 6.75 percent, from 740 in the last quarter of 2025 to 690 in the first

quarter of this year. The number of marriage registrations dropped by 9.2 percent quarter-on-quarter, from 896 to 814.

Based on Macau's land area of 33.4 km², the special administrative region's population density per km² amounted to 20,601 in the first quarter of this year, the world's highest of any country and territory, ahead of Monaco (population: 38,400, land area: 2.1 km², population density: 18,285), according to official data from the principality.

At the end of 1999, when the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) was established by the People's Republic of China (PRC), Macau had a land area of 23.8 km² and a population of 437,455, according to official MSAR data. ■

Customs seizes 3 tonnes of frozen pork tripe worth 110,000 patacas



This handout photo released by the Macau Customs Service on Saturday shows a pile of cartons containing supposedly frozen pork tripe stored at room temperature at a parallel trading den in the peninsula's northern district on Friday.

Armindo Neves

Macau Customs Service officers raided a parallel-trading den in the peninsula's northern district on Friday where they seized 3,000 kilograms of frozen pork tripe worth around 110,000 patacas in total.

According to a statement on Saturday, the officers caught a 20-year-old man from the Chinese mainland who ran the den and hired parallel traders to smuggle frozen pork tripe and other goods from Macau to the mainland.

The statement also said that customs officers also nabbed another eight people involved in the case.

The owner of the den will be fined in compliance with the relevant provisions listed in the External

Trade Law, the statement said. Moreover, the statement added, he violated the Food Safety Law as the supposedly frozen pork tripe was stored merely at room temperature, adding that the Customs Service has meanwhile transferred the case to the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) for follow-up action.

Meanwhile, the statement noted that the owner of the den and the eight other individuals were suspected of breaching the Law on the Employment of Non-Resident Workers as well as immigration and residency and stay permit regulations, adding that the Macau Customs Service has transferred the case to the Public Security Police (PSP) for follow-up. ■

UM hosts smart tourism symposium focused on innovation

Khalel Vallo

The public University of Macau (UM) hosted a smart tourism symposium on Friday, bringing together scholars and industry leaders to discuss innovation and development in the sector.

Titled "Smart Tourism Symposium 2026: Innovation and Impact", the one-day event was held as part of the university's 45th anniversary celebrations.

The event was sponsored by the University of Macau Development Foundation (UMDF), organised by the UM Asia-Pacific Academy of Economics and Management (APAEM), and co-organised by the university's Faculty of Business Administration (FBA).

Speaking at the opening, UM Vice Rector Ge Wei said the symposium aimed to serve as a platform for exchange between academia and industry, supporting national development strategies and promoting the integration of digital technologies into the real economy. He added that such exchanges could contribute to the sustainable development of Macau's tourism sector.

The symposium featured three themed presentations and two roundtable discussions. Among the speakers, Rob Law (羅振雄), deputy director of APAEM, introduced the academy's research focus and elaborated on the application of artificial intelligence (AI) in tourism and hospitality.

Meanwhile, Li Gang, professor at the School of Information



The University of Macau's (UM) Asia-Pacific Academy of Economics and Management (APAEM) Deputy Director Rob Law (羅振雄) addresses Friday's "Smart Tourism Symposium 2026: Innovation and Impact" on the public university's campus in Hengqin.

– Photo: Khalel Vallo

Technology at Deakin University in Australia, discussed how AI and large language models are reshaping hotel competitiveness, while Fiona He, general manager of the Marketing Department of Shiji Group, a company based in the Chinese mainland, shared industry practices in using digital tools to enhance operational efficiency and service quality.

The first roundtable discussion, moderated by FBA Prof. Davis Fong Ka Chio, brought together executives from Macau's six integrated resort operators – MGM China, Galaxy Entertainment

Group (GEG), Sands China, Melco Resorts & Entertainment, Wynn Macau, and SJM Resorts.

Discussions focused on smart tourism applications, non-gaming development and industry trends over the next five years.

Meanwhile, the second roundtable, moderated by Anthony Wong Ip Kin, another professor at FBA, gathered academics and industry experts to examine the balance between technological innovation and human interaction, as well as the application of research outcomes in the tourism market. ■

Police arrest HK couple for drug-trafficking & drug-taking

Armindo Neves

The Judiciary Police (PJ) arrested a couple from Hong Kong for drug-trafficking and drug-taking on Thursday, PJ spokesman Ho Wai Lok said during a special press conference on Friday.

Ho identified the couple as a 68-year-old male cleaner surnamed Li and a 59-year-old female surnamed Lo, who claimed to be jobless.

At around 4 p.m. on Thursday, the Judiciary Police received a report from a hotel staff member in Zape about a guest behaving suspiciously. Upon arriving at the scene, PJ officers intercepted the couple and seized three packets of suspected cocaine from Li, weighing around 29.43 grams in total, along with HK\$83,300 (85,800 patacas) in suspected drug proceeds, Ho said.

During a search of the hotel guestroom where the two suspects were staying, Ho said, PJ officers seized three more additional packets of suspected cocaine weighing around 4.82 grams in total, along with drug taking paraphernalia including glass containers, glass tubes, and



Judiciary Police (PJ) officers escort the two hooded drug suspects from Hong Kong to a PJ van outside the PJ headquarters in Zape on Friday.

– Photo: Maria Cheang Ut Meng

lighters. In total, 34.25 grams of cocaine were confiscated during the operation, with an estimated street value of 68,500 patacas, according to Ho.

The investigation revealed that both suspects have a habit of drug use, with urine tests returning positive results, Ho said, adding that the drugs were smuggled into Macau from Hong Kong by Li, for sale here.

Ho also said that the pair had

been staying in Macau for about two to three months.

Ho added that the exact duration of their stay at the hotel and the intended recipients of the drugs were still under investigation during Friday's press conference.

The couple were transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) on Friday, facing charges of drug-trafficking, drug-taking, and possession of drug taking paraphernalia. ■

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Macau Weather

CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY PERIODS.
FORCE 2 TO 3 SOUTHEASTERLY WINDS.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 65% AND 90%.



23°C~29°C

Source: SMG

Forum, guided art tour to be held for Red Market Art & Cultural Fest 2025-2026

Rui Pastorin

A forum and a guided art tour will be held this Saturday as part of MyLand Culture's ongoing two-year, community driven initiative "Red Market Art & Cultural Fest 2025-2026".

The upcoming forum, titled "The Many Possibilities of the Market: Forum on Community Sustainability", will feature experts, scholars, artists and community design practitioners from Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau. It will take place at SiFang Art Space in the Asia Industrial Building, located opposite the Red Market on Avenida do Almirante Lacerda, according to information provided by the Macau-based arts

and cultural organisation.

Held mainly in Cantonese, with some presentations in Putonghua, the event will last from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m., with admission at 50 patacas per person. The statement said that the event will "focus on the possibilities of market transformation, community design and artistic intervention as models for market development, and methods for identifying community needs".

The Cantonese-language art tour, meanwhile, is titled "Contemporary Art Experience at the Red Market" and is part of "The Market is Also a Contemporary Artwork" residency programme that was launched in mid-March

that invited Hong Kong artist Pak Sheung-chuen. Pak, "known for his long-term engagement with community-based practice", will lead the tour as part of residency programme, the statement said.

The tour from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. will showcase the "creative journey, community explorations and artistic outcomes" of the entire residency project.

Members of the public can also visit an exhibition featuring works co-created with participants of workshops led by Pak as part of the residency programme until mid-June from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily.

The statement said that forum registration can be done via Instagram on @mylandculture or <https://www.facebook.com/mylandculture> on Facebook. ■



This poster provided by MyLand Culture on Thursday promotes the upcoming "The Many Possibilities of the Market: Forum on Community Sustainability" set to take place on Saturday.

Hac Sa Reservoir Natural Park to add butterfly-friendly garden



This rendered image provided by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) on Thursday shows some of the green areas in Hac Sa Reservoir Natural Park in Coloane to be optimised for the creation of butterfly-friendly garden and ecological environment. N.B. A rendered photo is a picture created by a computer rather than a camera. While it may look like a traditional photograph, it is actually a 2D image generated from a 3D digital model. – Gemini

Khalel Vallo

Some green areas of the Hac Sa Reservoir Natural Park in Coloane will be optimised to create a butterfly-friendly garden aimed at enhancing biodiversity, according to a statement by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) on Thursday.

The bureau, which started the project on Thursday, expects it to be completed in July, the statement said, adding that the initiative follows the opening of Macau's first butterfly-friendly garden in Seac Pai Van Park in March.

The statement noted that the new project will focus on improving ecological conditions by introducing a wider variety of plant species to support butterfly habitats, underlining that some of the park's existing green areas offer only limited plant diversity, with signs of deterioration not conducive to biodiversity.

In order to address the issue, the

bureau will introduce nuclear and host plants such as Lagerstroemia indica, Odontonema strictum, Asclepias curassavica, Jasminum sambac, Plumbago auriculata and Tibouchina granulosa.

These plants are expected to attract butterflies and create a natural corridor suitable for resting, foraging and breeding, the statement said, adding that the project will also allow visitors to observe butterflies up close, helping to raise public awareness of ecological conservation.

During the phase-by-phase project, parts of the green areas will be temporarily enclosed, with on-site signage providing information about the project, according to the statement.

The bureau advised visitors to follow safety instructions while using the park and called for public understanding regarding temporary inconvenience during the optimisation work, the statement noted. ■

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Cosplayers call for greater public acceptance

Armando Neves

According to Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai's 2026 Policy Address, the Macau government is set to further develop a public-private-community cooperation model, aimed at enhancing the city's brand recognition through cultural industry events.

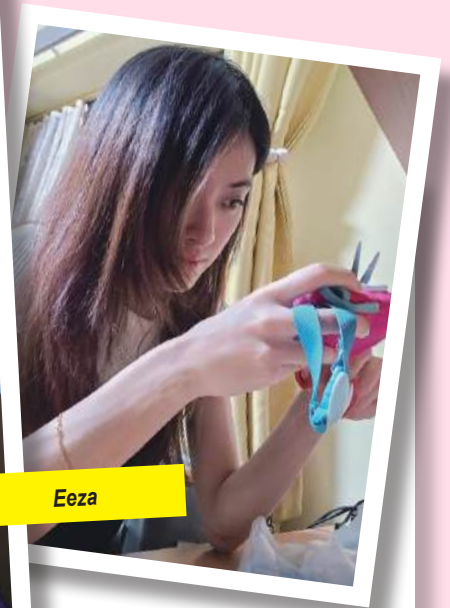
Between late March and mid-April, MGM, in collaboration with China Literature Limited (阅文集团), hosted a series of anime IP-themed events across Macau. According to the organisers, these events attracted both residents and tourists, boosting foot traffic and consumer spending as visitors flocked to take photos of popular anime characters.

The *Post* recently interviewed three seasoned cosplayers – nicknamed Eeza, Lily, and Sandra – at a studio on Avenida do Ouvidor Arriaga, to gain an insight into the development of the local cosplay industry.

Cosplay is a performance art in which participants, known as cosplayers, wear costumes and accessories to portray specific characters.

The group also ran a booth called "The Little Wish" at the 21st Macau Comic Festival (MCF21) last year. The booth held a raffle during the event to raise funds for Anima-Society for the Protection of Animals, offering anime- and cosplay-themed photo opportunities.

Sandra, Lily, and Eeza – a hotel receptionist, a university sophomore, and a PhD student at the University of Macau (UM), respectively – each have over six years of experience in their hobby. What began as simple curiosity during their schooldays has evolved into an integral part of their lives. They describe cosplay as a turning point, noting that the practice helped them transition from introverted youngsters to more confident individuals.



Eeza

However, behind the glamour, cosplayers often face significant pressure. Common challenges include anxiety over online engagement, appearance-based criticism, skin allergies caused by heavy makeup, and pressure from family members who question whether the activity is a "serious pursuit." Some cosplayers also report being targeted for "over-editing" their photos. They are calling on the public to view cosplay as an ordinary hobby – comparable to engaging in sport or playing video games – rather than through a judgmental or dismissive lens.

As Macau has seen a rise in government-supported anime events and commercial exhibitions, the trio agrees that cosplay is becoming increasingly mainstream.

Sandra notes that in the past, cosplayers were reluctant to use public transport in full costume. Now, it is common to see young people in full makeup and fully dressed on buses and at the Barrier Gate checkpoint, indicating a marked improvement in public acceptance. However, they caution that this commercialisation is a double-edged sword: while it enhances professionalism, it may also lead some youths to pursue fame and financial gain at the expense of their social values. They acknowledge that the impact of commercialisation on young people requires careful management.

Regarding income, the three noted that revenue streams in Macau are becoming increasingly diverse.

Lily explained that she previously worked as a freelance wig stylist and makeup artist, earning a four-figure monthly income during peak convention seasons. Eeza added that some individuals accept "commissions" to play specific characters – accompanying clients on shopping trips or to dinner – a service similar to professional companionship that is particularly popular in the Chinese mainland.

Sandra noted that some photographers pay an hourly rate for photoshoots, occasionally covering the cost of costumes and makeup. She added that many local cosplayers now curate their personal image on Instagram, aiming their activities at an international audience rather than limiting themselves to the local market.

Ultimately, however, they maintain that Macau's market remains too small to make a living from cosplay alone. Most participants continue to "fuel their passion through love," relying on full- or part-time employment to support their hobby. They expressed hope for a future in which civil society views their subculture with greater understanding and public acceptance.



Lily



Sandra



Undated and unlocated photos courtesy by Eeza, Lily and Sandra, respectively. International cosplayers on p.16

Live jazz, food to converge at Angela's Café and Lounge

Rui Pastorin

A live jazz show titled "First Beats Where the Music Begins" is slated to take place on Saturday at "Angela's Café and Lounge" in Lisboeta Macao in Cotai, with three local musicians set to perform at the event.

According to a recent statement from the Macau-themed integrated resort, the music performances by the jazz ensemble will be accompanied by both Macanese* and Portuguese fare as part of a dinner package, as well as welcome cocktails and snacks. The event, scheduled to take place at 7 p.m. and is priced at 298 patacas per guest, will take place under the "nostalgic ambiance of the 1950s", the statement said.

The ensemble will comprise Chak Seng Lam, Gregory Wong (黃永豪) and Winky Lei (李穎麟).

According to the statement, Chak, a saxophone player and instructor, graduated from the Royal Conservatory of Music

in The Hague and performs internationally, having also been named one of the "Top 100 International Cultural Role Models" in 2024

Jazz trombonist Wong, meanwhile, is described in the statement as being a "representative figure in Macau's jazz scene" and has extensive stage experience. He trained under masters Chu Ping-shan and Zé Eduardo, the statement said.

Lastly, trombone instructor Lei, a graduate of National Tsing Hua University, is a trombone instructor active in both performance and music education, the statement said, adding that she has had solo recitals and award-winning achievements. ■

*Customarily, the term "Macanese" refers to Macau's community of mixed Portuguese and Asian extraction and upbringing, and their diaspora, as well as their culinary and cultural traditions. — MPD



This poster downloaded from the Lisboeta Macao website last night promotes Saturday's jazz gig at Angela's Café and Lounge in Cotai.

Govt to provide mosquito repellents at 12 parks & rest areas

Continued from p.1

'Health Fuel Stations'

Meanwhile, the bureau also announced during Saturday's ceremony that it has launched a shared mosquito repellent scheme, where mosquito repellents starting today are available at the 12 government-run "Health Fuel Stations" across the city for everybody to use.

The operation of the "Health Fuel Stations" is a new community programme that the government launched in January this year aiming to enable residents to gain "easy" access to its "health resources", with the objective of encouraging more residents to maintain a healthy lifestyle. The programme is jointly carried out by the Health Bureau (SSM), the Sports Bureau (ID), and the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), with the aim of leveraging the synergy effect created by the three public entities' respective services provided to residents.

Specifically, the programme launched in January this year is the government's first-ever initiative to integrate three elements of "health information, scientific exercise, and cultural nourishment", provided by the three bureaus respectively, into a single community setting.

When the programme was launched early this year, eight "Health Fuel Stations" were set up across the city, before the government raised the number of such stations to a dozen last month.

The government also extended the scope of services provided by the "Health Fuel Stations" last month.

Six of the 12 stations open every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, while the other six open every Tuesday and Thursday. The 12 stations, located in public parks and sitting-out areas, are operated between 8 a.m. and 10 a.m., and between 4:30 p.m. and 7 p.m.

Each of the 12 stations is jointly run by the three bureaus, where the Health Bureau provides participants with free blood pressure tests, blood

健康加油站 Health and Wellness Station

站點信息
Information about the service at the Health and Wellness Station points

星期一至五 On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays	站點 Point
上午時段 Morning session 8:00-10:00	紀念孫中山市政公園 Parque Municipal de Sun Yat Sen
	白鶴園公園 Jardim de Loui de Castelos
下午時段 Afternoon session 16:30-19:00	二龍喉公園 Jardim de Fátima
	綠楊花園休憩區 Zona de Lazer do Cliff Lock Young Fátima
	華士古達嘉馬花園 Jardim Vasco da Gama
	葛拉士前地休憩區 Zona de Lazer do Praca de Francisco de Mendis
星期二、四 On Tuesdays and Thursdays	站點 Point
上午時段 Morning session 8:00-10:00	永寧廣場休憩區 Zona de Lazer do EOP de Alameda da Transquilidade
	宋玉生公園 Parque Dr. Carlos d'Assumpção
下午時段 Afternoon session 16:30-19:00	和路廣場休憩區 Zona de Lazer do Alameda da Harmonia
	加思藤花園 Jardim de S. Francisco
	逸仔奧林匹克大馬路休憩區 Zona de Lazer da Avenida Olímpica
	結實街市公園 Jardim da Mercado da Sao Man

政府假日、惡劣天氣及維護期間除外
except holidays, in case of adverse weather conditions or during maintenance periods.

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This poster released by the Health Bureau (SSM) earlier this year shows the information on the 12 "Health Fuel Stations". The English translation was arranged by the Post.

glucose tests, health information and assessments, while the Sports Bureau provides personalised scientific exercise guidance, and the Cultural Affairs Bureau provides participants with guidance and information on various arts and cultural activities.

More locations to have shared mosquito repellents

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of Saturday's ceremony, Leong Iek Hou, who heads the Health Bureau's Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), said that shared mosquito repellents are available from today at the 12 "Health

Fuel Stations" in the first phase, after which the government will extend the availability of the repellents to public health centres, health inspection posts at border checkpoints, and various other government facilities later this month.

After reviewing the implementation of the measure, she said, the government will extend the availability of the repellents to more public facilities as well as those run by major community associations.

Leong underlined that all facilities and premises providing shared mosquito repellents will be staffed during operating hours to ensure the proper hygiene and use of the repellents. ■

HK's IP system, advantages help brands go global'

HONG KONG — Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu vowed yesterday to help Hong Kong businesses with brand building, while also paving the way for those from the mainland to expand overseas.

He made the remarks during a speech by video link at the World Brand Conference in Hong Kong.

Lee said Hong Kong's advantages under the 'One Country, Two Systems' policy make it a global platform. He added that Hong Kong's intellectual property (IP) system offers strong brand protection, and the government will keep improving trademark rules and fighting infringements.

He said that with a stable and transparent system, brands can safely innovate and grow on the regional and world stages.

"The [HKSAR] government actively supports mainland enterprises and brands to go global. Last year, we set up the GoGlobal Task Force to help mainland enterprises and brands use Hong Kong's international platform to expand business overseas," he said.

"Hong Kong, as a city of exhibitions, can provide a high-level platform for exhibitions and major events for different mainland enterprises, promoting excellent mainland brands to more overseas markets, and serving the country's high-quality economic development."

He added that the government helps local businesses build their own brands through funding schemes, supporting SMEs to upgrade, reach new markets, and become more competitive.

— RTHK, MPD

HK has 'the influence to be hub for mediation': FM Commissioner Cui

HONG KONG — The Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Hong Kong, Cui Jianchun, said on Saturday he believes that the special administrative region (SAR) has its own sphere of influence in its attempt to become a hub for mediation.

Speaking at the final of a contest on diplomatic knowledge at Polytechnic University, Cui expressed confidence that more states would join the International Organization for Mediation (IOM) to settle disputes within the coming five years.

The Hong Kong-based intergovernmental body currently has 41 member states.

"When the United Nations was

first established, there were only 51 founding member states," Cui said.

"It is a bit of an overstatement to say that all current 193 member states of the United Nations will join the International Organization for Mediation. But I believe the organisation will grow to have more than 51 member states."

Cui also encouraged students to live up to Hong Kong's "Lion Rock spirit" by turning failure into strength, saying their talents are needed in "major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics in the new era".

Speaking at the same event, Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu said Hong Kong can serve the overall development of the country by nurturing the next generation.

"The hope of the country lies in the youth. The future of the nation lies in the youth," he said.

"Nurturing the younger generation to have a broad international perspective and a deep sense of belonging to the country is precisely where Hong Kong can leverage its advantages."

Lee also expressed hope that students who participated in the contest would integrate the experiences into their daily studies and pay more attention to national development.

This year's "Hong Kong Cup Diplomatic Knowledge Contest" saw a record number of registrations with 290 schools and nearly 90,000 students participating.

— RTHK, MPD

Brazilian youth orchestra strikes new chord in China-Brazil cultural exchange



The NEOJIBA Orchestra of Brazil performs at the Tianjin Grand Theater in north China's port city of Tianjin on May 3.

— Xinhua

Analysis

TIANJIN — Warm light washed over the concert hall of the Tianjin Grand Theater as a stream of orchestral music flowed like an audio clear spring, filling every corner of the space. On stage, the Neojiba Orchestra of Brazil was building toward a climax.

On May 3, the orchestra made its debut in the northern Chinese port city of Tianjin and successfully concluded its performance.

"We deliberately chose pieces that include traditional Brazilian elements," conductor Ricardo Castro said. "This is not only a musical performance, but also a way of sharing our culture. We hope Chinese audiences can understand Brazil's stories through the music."

The auditorium was packed. The concert offered a rich showcase of Brazil's diverse musical heritage, highlighted by the distinctive sound of the berimbau, a traditional instrument rooted in African culture and central to Brazil's capoeira tradition.

Young soloist Raysson Lima performed with confidence, plucking the single-string instrument as its

resonant tones echoed through the hall.

The instrument was made from a steel wire originally taken from a car tire and a dried gourd used as a resonator. Despite its simplicity, it conveys a wide range of emotions.

"It comes from everyday life and nature," Lima said. "That's what gives it such expressive power, reflecting the Brazilian people's love of life."

Founded in 2007, the NEOJIBA* program is a widely recognized public music initiative in Brazil. Over the past 18 years, the program has provided music education opportunities to thousands of children from underprivileged backgrounds.

"Our goal has always been to create equal access to music education," Castro said. "Many of these children would never have had the chance to learn an instrument. Through this program, we help them discover their potential and change their lives through music."

The performance also forms part of the 2026 China-Brazil Cultural Year, a series of events spanning performing arts, music, intangible cultural heritage and youth exchanges, aimed at

strengthening mutual understanding and friendship between the two countries.

Through the concert, the young Brazilian musicians not only demonstrated their artistic talent but also built a closer cultural connection with the Chinese audience.

"Even though we come from different cultural backgrounds and speak different languages, music is a universal language," said concertmaster Isaac Bispo. "It breaks barriers and allows us to connect on a deeper level."

"Music is not only an artistic expression for us. It is also a way of passing on our culture and telling Brazil's story to the world," Castro said. "Through this performance, we hope to share the joy and freedom of Brazil with Chinese audiences, and to deepen mutual understanding through music."

— Xinhua

*NEOJIBA stands for "Núcleos Estaduais de Orquestras Juvenis e Infantis da Bahia" (State Nuclei of Youth and Children's Orchestras of Bahia). It is a major social-musical program based in the state of Bahia, northeastern Brazil. — Gemini

China pavilion bridges past, future at Venice Biennale

Analysis by Xinhua writers Diao Ze, Wang Yihan

VENICE, Italy — The China pavilion of the 61st International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, has attracted visitors' growing interest, with its presentation bridging the past and the future.

Since joining the Venice Biennale in 2003, the China pavilion has become an important platform for Chinese contemporary art to meet international audience.

Themed as Dream Stream, the China pavilion this year tries to deliver a sense of crossing time and space. The theme was named after Dream Stream Essays, an encyclopedia written by Shen Kuo in China's Song Dynasty.

The exhibition combines calligraphy, video, digital art, multimedia installations and robot display to present Chinese tradition in new forms.

Artist Xu Jiang noted that "Dream Stream" includes elements from the treasure house of Chinese culture which are presented through imagination.

One of the highlights is a robot which writes the Chinese characters of "Dream Stream" with a writing brush. Its mechanical arm guides the writing brush with rhythm on the paper, showing the force and beauty of Chinese calligraphy, with visitors gathering around and taking pictures.

Italian visitor Vanna Rossetti said Chinese calligraphy moved her deeply, calling it "a beautiful form of communication."

Italian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Transport Matteo Salvini said he admired Chinese culture and praised the exhibition as "wonderful," noting that it showed both China's historical culture and its vision for the future.

After receiving a robot-written calligraphy work of "Dream Stream," he said he liked the fragrance of Chinese ink and would place the work in his office.

Laura Fincato, former Italian deputy foreign minister, said the China pavilion reflects openness, dialogue and connection, as well as the creativity of the artists. She said art and culture remain important forces in building bridges when the world needs more communication and mutual understanding.

Li Xiaoyong, chargé d'affaires of the Chinese Embassy in Italy, said China and Italy, both ancient civilizations, will continue to deepen exchanges in art, cultural heritage protection and other fields, strengthening the people-to-people exchanges for the development of bilateral ties.

The exhibition of the China pavilion will last till November. — Xinhua

One year on, new marriage rules deliver a nuptial uptick, spending boost

Analysis

BEIJING — "It took us 45 phone calls before we finally secured an appointment," Lu Wei recalled, describing his marriage registration trip with his wife along the shores of the picturesque Erhai Lake in Yunnan Province.

In March, the post-2000s couple from Guangdong Province obtained their marriage certificate at an official registration venue at the Erhai Lake scenic area.

A pre-booked photographer captured their special moment by the lakeside. For the couple, marriage registration is no longer merely an administrative formality, but a memorable highlight they will cherish for years to come.

Stories like this have become increasingly common across China, one year after a nationwide policy update in May 2025. The reform, the first major revision to China's marriage registration ordinance in more than two decades, allows residents to complete marriage registration at any qualified civil affairs registry nationwide, and abolishes the household registration booklet as a mandatory application document.

The policy revision is designed to adapt to China's highly mobile population. The country is home to around 376 million migrant residents, and cross-provincial employment and intercity living have become the norm. Under the old rules, couples were required to return to the household registration place of either partner to register their marriage, adding both time and financial costs and, in some cases, delaying marriage plans.

The reform — aimed at lowering institutional thresholds and enabling cross-regional marriage registration — is driving changes in both marriage choices and related consumption trends.

Data from the Ministry of Civil Affairs shows the authorities registered 6.76 million marriages in 2025, up 657,000 year-on-year.

Simplified registration procedures are conducive to the marriage rebound in many regions, said Yuan Xin, vice president of the China Population Association and professor at Nankai University.

Yang Fan, associate dean of the School of Population and Health at Renmin University of China, echoed the view.

Practical improvements keep rolling out to make registration easier. For instance, online reservation systems and extended service hours have further facilitated the process nationwide, reducing the average registration time to around 15 minutes in many places.

Another notable shift concerns the venues of marriage registration. Nowadays, they can take place in marriage registration offices or parks and scenic spots.

A young woman surnamed Chen from Hunan Province is a typical example. She and her partner planned a 20-day road trip spanning Lanzhou, Dunhuang and Xinjiang, tying the knot by Sayram Lake in Xinjiang on May 7.

Her experience encapsulates the trend of integrating marriage registration with tourism. Local authorities nationwide are actively tapping into this potential by integrating marriage services with tourism and wedding-related industries.

In Yiwu, Zhejiang Province, local authorities have set up a full business chain that covers wedding photography, event planning, and commemorative consumption.

In Zhejiang's Taishun County, couples can register for marriage beside ancient covered bridges, try on local ethnic wedding attire, and stay at nearby boutique homestays, turning the registration into a mini honeymoon getaway. The initiative has generated over 20 million yuan in wedding tourism revenue.

On social media platform Xiaohongshu, topics themed on "ceremonial marriage registration" have amassed nearly 700 million views.

The trend is giving strong impetus to China's "sweet economy." Consumption demand has expanded from on-site makeup, styling and photography to accommodation and catering.

From a broader policy perspective, China is steadily improving its marriage and childbearing support policies to foster a more enabling environment amid long-term demographic challenges.

The government has rolled out a range of family benefits, including an annual tax-free childcare subsidy of 3,600 yuan for families with children under three, as well as free tuition for the final year of kindergarten.

Yang Fan noted that policy effects take time to materialize. "It is a gradual process," Yang said, adding that long-term stability and policy continuity are key.

— Xinhua

Russia-China interaction is most important factor in stabilizing int'l relations: Putin

MOSCOW – Interaction between Russia and China is the most important factor in stabilizing international relations, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Saturday.

Speaking at a press conference, Putin described cooperation between states like China and Russia as “undoubtedly a factor of deterrence and stability” in global affairs.

He noted that China is Russia's largest trade and economic partner, adding that bilateral trade diversification continues through high-tech industries, which is very important.

Putin also said that Russia and China have reached a high level of agreement to “take a serious step forward” in oil and gas cooperation.

On the Ukraine crisis, Putin said he is ready to meet with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky not only in Moscow but also in a third country, but only for signing an agreement on a final peace treaty.

“It is possible to meet in a third country, but only if final agreements are reached on a peace treaty, which should be designed for a long-term historical perspective, in order to participate in this event or sign something, but this should be the final point, and not the negotiations themselves,” the Russian leader added.

– Xinhua

China, US to hold trade talks in S Korea this week

BEIJING – Senior Chinese and US officials will hold talks in South Korea this week, Beijing's commerce ministry and Washington's Treasury secretary said yesterday, ahead of an expected summit between leaders Xi Jinping and Donald Trump.

The Ministry of Commerce (MOC) said in a statement that Vice Premier He Lifeng, Beijing's top economic official,

will attend “consultations on mutual economic and trade issues” tomorrow and on Wednesday.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said in a post on X: “On Wednesday, I will stop in Seoul for a discussion with Vice Premier He Lifeng of China, before continuing on to Beijing for the Leaders' Summit between President Trump and President Xi.”

Trump is set to visit China for a high-stakes summit with Xi, with the two leaders expected to focus on easing tensions over trade and Taiwan, with the war in the Middle East looming large over talks.

While Washington and Beijing slapped tit-for-tat tariffs on each other's exports a year ago, Trump and Xi agreed on a year-long trade truce at their October meeting in South Korea.

– AFP



Volunteers arrange flowers with mothers at a community center for reading in Wuchang District of Wuhan City, Hubei Province, yesterday. Citizens across the nation sent their blessings in diverse ways to their mothers to mark yesterday's Mother's Day.

– Xinhua

World Brand Moganshan Summit showcases Chinese brands' global rise

Analysis

HANGZHOU – The 2026 World Brand Moganshan Summit opened yesterday in Deqing, Zhejiang Province, aiming to drive the high-quality development of Chinese brands and promote mutual learning and exchange among global brands.

Themed “Brands Bring Better Future for the World,” the summit serves as a platform for brand dialogue, bringing together government departments, Chinese and foreign enterprises, higher education institutions and industry associations to engage in in-depth discussions regarding brand development.

This year's event is co-hosted by the Brand Work Office of Xinhua News Agency, the China Council for Brand Development and the Zhejiang Branch of Xinhua News Agency. Its main agenda includes an opening ceremony and flagship forum, a press conference releasing China's brand value evaluation results and a world top 500 brands development forum. There are also featured side events such as brand value enhancement sessions, a high-quality cultural tourism development conference and a brand exhibition.

Lyu Yansong, editor-in-chief of Xinhua News Agency, stated in his address that Xinhua will tell stories of Chinese brands to enhance their visibility, reputation and international influence, and deepen think tank empowerment to provide scientific decision-making references for high-quality brand development. Meanwhile, Xinhua will also leverage its platform advantages to help Chinese brands reach the global market while enabling global brands to share in China's

opportunities, Lyu added.

Lian Yimin, chairman of the Zhejiang Provincial Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPC), said Zhejiang will strive to build a “Zhejiang Premium” brand matrix characterized by exceptional quality, cutting-edge technology, superior services, advanced culture, strong market competitiveness and high social reputation. With a first-class innovation ecosystem and a most competitive business environment, Zhejiang warmly welcomes global brands to invest, thrive and pursue innovative development in the province.

In recent years, a number of world-class Chinese brands have accelerated their growth, steadily increasing their brand value, market recognition, and global influence. This year's Global 500 brand value rankings report indicates that China serves as a key engine of global brand value growth. Chinese brands on the list achieved a record-high combined value, with 68 entries in the Global 500 representing 15.1 percent of the total value of the Global 500. Several Chinese brands now rank among the global leaders in sectors such as technology, utilities and finance.

A vivid example of this technological brand power is Unitree Robotics. During the recently concluded May Day holiday, Unitree's first directly-operated store in China, located in Beijing's Wangfujing shopping district, was bustling with visitors. Visitors eagerly interacted with the G1 humanoid robot, Go2 robot dog, and other products, experiencing the charm of technology up close.

The store represents a significant attempt by this closely-watched Chinese brand to

bring embodied AI products into everyday public life – transforming the company's technological breakthroughs in hardware structure, motion control, and human-computer interaction into more intuitive, hands-on product experiences for consumers.

Wang Xingxing, founder and CEO of Unitree Robotics, said in his speech at the summit's main forum that Unitree has always regarded innovation as the root of its brand. Since its founding in 2016, the company has insisted on developing core components in-house – from motors, reducers, core sensors to motion control algorithms – all independently developed and iteratively optimized.

It is reported that in 2025, the company's humanoid robot shipments exceeded 5,500 units, while its global market share for quadruped robots remained stable at between 60 and 70 percent.

Known as “the world's supermarket,” the city of Yiwu in Zhejiang hosts the world's largest wholesale market for small commodities. Looking back at the development of Yiwu's market, its brand building has followed a trajectory from “white-label” products to “self-owned brands” and then to “brands going global.”

Data shows that currently, over 21,600 merchants, accounting for more than 47 percent of all merchants, in the Yiwu International Trade Market have registered trademarks and IP, with those holding overseas registered trademarks making up over 10 percent of the total.

Ni Jianyong with the Zhejiang China Small Commodity City Group Co., Ltd., the operator of the Yiwu International Trade

Market, said that in 2023, Yiwu launched the world's first AI large language model in the field of commodity trading and developed AIGC applications, providing merchants with one-stop services ranging from AI design and AI product image generation to brand copywriting.

“This enables white-label merchants who previously had no knowledge of design or marketing to build a brand visual identity and a digital storefront at low cost,” Ni said. “Now, the AI model has rolled out 13 tools, serving 34,000 merchants, with those deeply using AI seeing a more-than-30-percent increase in orders.”

In the face of increasingly fierce international market competition, a number of Chinese brands have proactively sought transformation, extending their operations to all corners of the world and building a truly global presence.

According to Wang Meiyuan, vice president of Haier Group, a brand is a symbol of a nation's overall strength. Haier has been the world's No. 1 in major home appliance market share for 17 consecutive years, and has ranked in the top 10 of China's global brand builders for nine years running.

Haier now operates in more than 200 countries and regions, and ranks among the industry's top 5 in nearly 30 of them.

“The Chinese government has relentlessly pursued the innovation, design, and new creation strategy,” said David Haigh, chairman and CEO of Brand Finance. “The historic key words for China, or Chinese brands, are fast, reliable delivery, extremely low prices, and high-quality production.”

– Xinhua

Myanmar says massive 11,000-carat ruby discovered

YANGON—A huge 11,000-carat ruby has been discovered in Myanmar, state media reported Friday, one of the largest ever found in the country renowned for its precious gemstones.

President Min Aung Hlaing was pictured on the front page of the state-run *Global New Light of Myanmar* newspaper, examining the 2.2-kilogram rock at his office.

Unearthed in the Mogok area, the ruby was “exceptionally large, rare, and difficult to find,” the new military-backed government said in a statement.

“The giant ruby has a purplish-red colour with yellowish undertones and is considered to have a high-quality colour grade,” it added.

While smaller than a similar 21,450-carat ruby found in the same area in 1996, the recently discovered stone is more valuable “due to its superior colour, clarity, and overall quality,” the government said without giving a precise value.

Emperors, kings and warlords have long fought over the valley of Mogok in Mandalay region, where



This handout photo taken and released on Thursday by Myanmar Radio and Television (MRTV) shows Myanmar's President Min Aung Hlaing (right) holding an 11,000-carat ruby in Naypyidaw, after it was found at a gem tract in Mogok in Mandalay Region. — AFP

the unique “pigeon-blood” stones lie hidden.

The Mogok rubies are the most expensive in the world, with the highest-quality jewels fetching multi-million-dollar prices in an industry notoriously bereft of regulation.

Myanmar has been ruled by a junta since a 2021 coup that triggered a civil war, but former military chief Min Aung Hlaing was sworn in last month as civilian president after a tightly restricted election. — AFP

Tiny shifts seen in divided ASEAN's approach to Myanmar

Chad Williams

CEBU — Myanmar's junta moved deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi to house arrest last week but that was not enough to ease deep divisions among ASEAN leaders over how best to engage with the pariah state.

Myanmar is still a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations bloc but has been formally excluded from summits such as the one held in the central Philippines this week since the military junta snatched power.

The junta's 2021 coup toppled Suu Kyi's democratically elected government, triggering a bloody civil war and a crackdown on dissent.

Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos said on Friday members were “frustrated” by the years-long failure to successfully implement the bloc's five-point peace plan, suggesting a “fine-tuning” was in order.

“One of the arguments that was made is that the world has turned how many times since we started this discussion... and perhaps the context has changed a little bit,” he said.

“Unfortunately, we have not seen... any progress in Myanmar,” he added, describing an occasionally “emotional” meeting in Cebu.

A Thai diplomat confirmed that Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow had suggested ASEAN invite his Myanmar counterpart for a meeting.

“We need to change the way that we are engaging with Myanmar,” the diplomat told reporters on Friday.

Maratee Nalita Andamo, deputy spokeswoman for Thailand's foreign affairs department, said the “proposal was for engagement with Myanmar at the political level... and it was the start of a discussion”.

She said it had been received “in a positive light”.

However, a potential softening of the 11-member bloc's stance is not palatable to every member.

Malaysian Foreign Minister Mohamad Hasan told reporters on Thursday his country did not believe the junta had done enough to reclaim a seat at the table.

“We still feel uncomfortable, because oppression is still taking place, atrocities towards their own citizens are still occurring,” he said of Myanmar's junta.

“We want the new government formed after the election in Myanmar to truly follow what we set out in our (peace plan),” he said.

A fraying consensus

“ASEAN consensus on this matter is fraying,” said Dr Siew Mun Tang, a senior fellow at Singapore's ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.

There were member states ready to “let bygones be bygones”, given the bloc's longstanding lack of progress.

“There's no way you're going to turn back the clock, right? So let's move forward,” he said in describing the view of those states.

He said Thailand's porous border with Myanmar made it an “urgent national security” issue.

Sharon Seah, a principal fellow at the same university, said the bloc had limited leverage.

“The only real leverage ASEAN has is letting (Myanmar) play with the big boys at these summits,” she said, noting it still attends smaller meetings.

While it is widely believed Indonesia and Singapore are aligned with Malaysia, countries in the middle could tip the scales at some point, Seah said.

“I would say there's a fairly sizeable group of middle-group countries,” she said, identifying Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and possibly Brunei as potential “fence-sitters”.

“They can go either way if they see that there's actually some strategic sense in getting Myanmar to come back into the fold.”

‘One millimetre’

Before heading to a gala dinner that ended the summit, Marcos said ASEAN members had left their Friday afternoon session asking “what more can we do?”

Even a small shift in policy could potentially be of benefit, he said.

“Sometimes, when you move the parameters one millimetre, it makes all the difference,” he said, insisting that would not mean abandoning human rights.

“We're asking all the member states, all the leaders and their ministries, what that millimetre shift could possibly be,” he said.

“There are no definitive answers as yet, but we are certainly going to work on it very, very hard.” — AFP

Indonesia rescuers find hikers' bodies after volcanic eruption

INDONESIA — Indonesian rescuers retrieved yesterday the remains of two Singaporean hikers killed in a volcanic eruption in a seismic no-go zone, capping a three-day search operation, officials said.

Mount Dukono on Halmahera island erupted on Friday, sending an ash tower 10 kilometres above its peak and killing three climbers.

Seventeen other hikers, including seven Singaporeans, had been brought down safely.

Search and rescue teams, combing the area as the volcano continued rumbling and belching ash clouds, found the remains of the two dead Singaporeans yesterday, national disaster mitigation agency spokesman Abdul Muhari said in a statement.

Their bodies were found not far from where the remains of an Indonesian hiker had been found a day earlier, he added.

“The evacuation process of the last two bodies encountered obstacles due to the victims' position, being buried under volcanic materials of significant thickness and depth,” Abdul said.

The search operation has now officially ended, he added.

Local search and rescue agency head Iwan Ramdani said the bodies found yesterday were recovered during a “golden moment” between ongoing eruptions.

Speaking to reporters from a volcano monitoring station in Mamuya village, he said that the remains had been transported to a local hospital for identification, after which they would be handed over to the victims' families.

Staff from the Singapore embassy in Jakarta were in Halmahera to coordinate with rescuers and facilitate the repatriation of the seven Singaporean survivors, who were expected to return home yesterday, the city state's foreign ministry said in a statement.

Dukono, one of Indonesia's most active volcanoes, has been on level two of Indonesia's four-tiered alert system since 2008.

Authorities have imposed a four-kilometre exclusion zone around the crater since December 2024, according to the head of the government Geology Agency, Lana Saria.

Local police chief Erlichson Pasaribu said on Friday that the hikers had ignored social media appeals and warning signs put up at the entrance of the trail to stay away.

Indonesia, a vast archipelago nation, experiences frequent seismic and volcanic activity due to its position on the Pacific “Ring of Fire” where tectonic plates collide.

The Southeast Asian country has nearly 130 active volcanoes. — AFP



Suspected online gambling operators (in orange) walk towards buses for transfer after a police raid at the Hayam Wuruk Plaza office building in Jakarta yesterday. Indonesian police and immigration authorities said they arrested 321 foreign nationals, including suspects from Vietnam, China, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Malaysia and Cambodia. — AFP

4 dead, 10 hurt after jeepney crashes into tree in Philippines

MANILA — Four people were killed and at least 10 others were injured after a passenger jeepney carrying 20 people slammed into a tree in Oriental Mindoro province, the Philippines, yesterday morning, according to local authorities.

Police said the accident happened at around 8:30 a.m. [local time] along a curved downhill road in the municipality of Socorro. An initial investigation showed that the driver

lost control of the public utility vehicle after its brakes allegedly failed while descending the road. The vehicle reportedly rolled onto its side before crashing into a tree.

Rescuers and local emergency personnel rushed the injured passengers to nearby hospitals for treatment. Police said an investigation is ongoing to determine the exact circumstances surrounding the crash. — Xinhua

Car bomb attack on checkpoint kills at least 15 in northwest Pakistan: police

PESHAWAR – Militants detonated a car bomb at a checkpoint in northwestern Pakistan and opened fire on police, killing at least 15 and wounding three, officials said yesterday.

“Last night in the Fateh Khel area of Bannu, a suicide bomber rammed an explosives-laden vehicle into a police checkpoint, after which multiple militants entered the post,” Bannu police official Muhammad Sajjad Khan told AFP.

He said that 15 officers were confirmed dead, the latest attack in the border province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during a wave of militancy that has strained ties between Islamabad and Kabul.

Gunmen stormed the police checkpoint after the car blast, opening fire, according to officials who said they also used small drones in the attack.

“During the assault, the militants used quadcopters along with heavy weaponry,” a senior administrative official in Bannu told AFP on condition of anonymity.

He said more than 100 militants took part in the attack.

“In addition, while retreating, the attackers took police personnel and weapons from the station with them,” he added.

Bannu has been gripped in recent years by militant activity that has grown across Pakistan’s border regions.

The Taliban government in Kabul denies Pakistan’s accusations that Afghan territory is a safe harbour for militants, but the frosty relationship has spiralled into deadly armed conflict, including Pakistani airstrikes on cities in Afghanistan in recent months.

– AFP

Rose plantations gaining popularity in E Afghanistan

DARA-I-NUR – With its beautiful landscape and virgin nature, suitable for cultivating roses, Dara-i-Nur district in eastern Afghanistan’s Nangarhar province is rapidly becoming a rose hub in the country’s eastern region, as many farmers are turning to rose farming as a source of income.

They believe that the rose plantation is easier and more profitable than poppy growing.

“Rose farming is a profitable business and a good alternative to poppy. This business needs support and development,” Ahmad Siar, a farmer, told Xinhua in his rose farm.

While collecting rose flowers from his farm in the Dara-i-Nur district, he said with joy that he is satisfied with the earnings from his work and business.

Around eight rose-collecting centers have been established in Dara-i-Nur district, the farmer said, adding that some 50,000 kilograms of rose petals had been collected so far this year.

“The farmers, after collecting their rose petals, transport them to the collecting centers and from there shift them to the factory

to make perfume and export overseas,” Siar said.

Situated in a mountainous terrain and covered by trees, the lush green but isolated Dara-i-Nur district has been gaining popularity with the increasing rose farming culture over the past few years.

Although the remote district is underdeveloped, the scent of roses has turned it into a leisure spot for people living in adjoining areas.

“I used to farm poppies, but now cultivate roses, which gives reasonable benefit compared to poppies – along with their fragrance and a refreshing effect on your mood,” another farmer, Nasim Khan, said, advocating rose plantation as a profitable source of livelihood.

Ehsanullah Irfan, also a farmer, told Xinhua that rose farming has created job opportunities for numerous people to earn a livelihood and support their families.

“About 1,500 people are working in the rose farms, collecting petals and earning daily wages,” Irfan said, adding that people are happy with their incomes.

– Xinhua

No trees, no fans: surviving extreme heat in India’s salt pans

Uzmi Athar

INDIA – India faces challenging heatwaves each year, but few places endure conditions as searing as the country’s western desert salt pans, where workers rely on simple techniques to survive almost unbearable temperatures.

Up to 50,000 workers in Gujarat spend eight months on the remote salt pans without electricity or healthcare, relying on a tanker to deliver drinking and washing water every 25 days.

They use shaded rest breaks, cloth-cooled water bottles and staggered hours to survive.

In Gujarat’s Little Rann of Kutch summer temperatures routinely cross 45C, and can climb to 47–48C.

The same dry heat that makes life punishing also makes the desert ideal for salt production – Gujarat produces roughly three-quarters of India’s total salt output.

“We work in staggered timing... doing our work in early mornings and after sunset,” said 42-year-old Babulal Narayan, who rakes the salt as brine water dries in shallow pools.

During the hottest hours, many retreat to makeshift huts – frames of sticks draped with coarse homespun cloth, plastered with wild donkey dung.

“We sit here every two to three hours, so that we do not feel weak or dizzy,” said 17-year-old salt worker Bhavna Rathore.

The dung blocks the sun and allows heat to escape, while the rough cloth allows some air to pass through, she explained.

The huts offer shelter in a landscape without trees or natural shade, and where the sun reflects harshly off the white salt crust.

‘Heatwave’

Kanchan Narayan, 44, uses a damp cloth-wrapped bottle hung on a string, cooling the drinking water inside via evaporation.

“The wind helps to cool the water,” she said.

Poornima, a salt pan worker, sips black tea during the day – saying the hot drink induces sweating in the dry weather to cool the body.

The salt is produced by pumping saline water from bore-wells into shallow pans, where the liquid evaporates under the sun and wind.



This photograph taken on April 29 shows a woman pouring drinking water into an earthen pot at the Little Rann of Kutch region in Gujarat.

India faces challenging heatwaves each year, but few places endure conditions as searing as the country’s western desert salt pans, where workers rely on simple techniques to survive almost unbearable temperatures. In Gujarat’s Little Rann of Kutch summer temperatures routinely cross 45 degrees Celsius and can climb to 47–48C. Up to 50,000 workers spend eight months on the remote salt pans without electricity or healthcare, relying on a tanker to deliver drinking and washing water every 25 days.

– AFP

Workers rake the surface daily to ensure even crystallisation. Over weeks, a thick crust of salt forms, which the workers break and stack into mounds.

The job has always involved enduring harsh conditions, but this year the India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecasts an “above-normal number of heatwave days” across several regions, including Gujarat.

Workers are exposed to the heat for longer than before.

Previously, they relied on expensive diesel pumps to bring the saline water to the surface. But a switch to solar has brought down costs and allowed families to operate the pans for longer.

That means work that used to end in March now continues into the hottest months.

‘Fever’

The consequences for workers can be deadly, with regular reports of fatigue, dizziness and nausea – signs of heat stress, when the body’s natural cooling systems are overwhelmed.

This can cause organ failure and even death.

Several studies have found high levels of dehydration, heat stress and even signs of kidney malfunction among these communities.

“I take a paracetamol whenever fever becomes high,” said Kanchan,

a rare worker wearing rubber boots – to protect against prolonged exposure to brine, that can crack skin so deep it bleeds.

India has no fixed legal temperature at which work must stop.

Instead, it relies on IMD heatwave thresholds – around 40C for alerts and 47C for “severe” conditions – with local authorities imposing restrictions.

The desert conditions make the extreme heat marginally more survivable – at low humidity, sweat evaporates more quickly off the skin, cooling the body.

But conditions are growing harder, with heatwaves intensifying and unseasonal storms also threatening livelihoods.

A sudden rainstorm can dissolve crystallised salt overnight – forcing workers to restart the evaporation cycle.

“A big dust storm hit us last month, destroying salt worth 200,000 rupees (US\$2,100),” Narayan said.

He and five relatives made a profit of 250,000 rupees (US\$2,635) – or US\$450 each for eight months of hard work.

But families say they have little alternative.

“What else will we do?” said 65-year-old worker Rasoda Rathore.

“We have no land to farm, no livestock to earn our livelihood from... this is all we know.” – AFP

Top Sri Lankan Buddhist monk arrested over alleged sex abuse

COLUMBO – Sri Lankan authorities arrested a senior Buddhist monk on Saturday for the alleged sexual abuse of an underage girl, police said, marking the highest-profile case involving clergy in the country.

Pallegama Hemarathana, 71, was arrested at a private hospital in the capital Colombo where he had sought treatment over the weekend amid an investigation into the alleged abuse of the 11-year-old girl in 2022.

The crime is alleged to have taken place at a highly venerated

temple in Anuradhapura, around 200 kilometres north of Colombo, where Hemarathana is the chief priest.

“We will be guided by the magistrate on further action,” a police statement said Saturday.

The monk will soon be presented before a judge.

Authorities added that the victim’s mother has also been arrested for aiding and abetting the monk.

The development comes a day after a local court in Anuradhapura imposed a foreign travel ban on the monk.

There have been several cases of clergy abusing children in Sri Lanka, but the latest arrest involves the most senior monk to be accused of such a crime.

The 71-year-old is the chief custodian of a tree believed to have been grown from a sapling of the Bodhi tree in India that sheltered the Buddha when he attained enlightenment more than 2,500 years ago.

He is also the chief of eight highly venerated temples that are on a key Buddhist pilgrim route. – AFP



A person picks rose petals in a rose garden in Nangarhar province, Afghanistan, last Monday.

– Xinhua

Iran responds to US peace proposal as drones hit Gulf

TEHRAN – Iran responded to Washington's latest peace proposal yesterday, after drones threatened several Gulf region targets and Tehran warned it would not hold back from retaliating against any new US strikes.

According to state broadcaster IRIB, Tehran's response, passed to Pakistani mediators, focuses on ending the war "on all fronts, especially Lebanon" – where Israel has kept up its fight with Iran-backed Hezbollah – as well as on "ensuring shipping security".

US President Donald Trump had said he was expecting Iran's reply by Friday, but as the wait dragged on, the ceasefire in the Gulf came under increasing strain, including from yesterday's drone strikes, one of which hit and damaged a freighter sailing towards a port in Qatar.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) accused Iran of being behind another attack that targeted its territory in what would be, if confirmed, only the second alleged strike on a Gulf country since the start of the month-old truce.

"We will never bow down to the enemy, and if there is talk of dialogue or negotiation, it does not mean surrender or retreat," Iranian President Masoud



An Iranian woman walks past an anti-US and anti-Israel mural painted on a wall, in the capital Tehran yesterday. The spokesman for the Iranian parliament's national security commission warned the United States yesterday against any attacks on vessels in Gulf waters, saying Iran's restraint was over. – AFP

Pezeshkian said on X yesterday.

Tehran's military chief Ali Abdollahi, meanwhile, met the country's supreme leader Mojtaba Khamenei and received "new directives and guidance for the continuation of operations to confront the enemy", according to Iranian state television.

'Restraint over'

Qatar's defence ministry said a freighter arriving in the country's waters from Abu Dhabi was hit by a drone

yesterday off the port of Mesaieed.

The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations centre said the bulk carrier reported being struck by an unknown projectile.

"There was a small fire that has been extinguished, there are no casualties. There is no reported environmental impact," it said.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility, but Iran's Fars news agency reported that "the bulk carrier that was struck near the coast

of Qatar was sailing under a US flag and belonged to the United States".

In a social media post yesterday, the spokesman for the Iranian parliament's national security commission warned the United States yesterday: "Our restraint is over as of today."

"Any attack on our vessels will trigger a strong and decisive Iranian response against American ships and bases," Ebrahim Rezaei said.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards had threatened the day before to target US interests in the Middle East if its tankers came under fire – as they did on Friday when a US fighter jet fired on and disabled two Iran-flagged vessels in the Gulf of Oman.

Drone strikes

The UAE said that its territory had also come under attack, and called out Iran by name.

"UAE air defence systems successfully engaged two UAVs [unmanned aerial vehicles] launched from Iran," the defence ministry said, in a social media post.

Iran's neighbour Kuwait also reported an attempted attack.

"At dawn today, the armed forces detected a number of hostile

drones in Kuwaiti airspace, which were dealt with in accordance with established procedures," the military posted yesterday.

In Seoul, defence ministry spokesman Park Il told reporters that a South Korean cargo vessel had been hit last Monday and was damaged by fire before making its way to port in Dubai.

"On May 4, two unidentified aircraft struck the outer plate of the port-side ballast tank at the stern of the HMM Namu at roughly one-minute intervals, causing flames and smoke," he said.

Iran has choked off the Strait of Hormuz – a vital route out of the Gulf for oil, gas and fertiliser, seeking to wield economic leverage over the United States and its allies.

The US Navy, meanwhile, is blockading Iran's ports, at times disabling or diverting ships heading to and from them.

Iran has set up a payment mechanism to extract tolls from shipping crossing the strait, but US officials have stressed it would be "unacceptable" for Tehran to control what had been an international waterway and the route of a fifth of the world's oil exports. – AFP

Trump says US would need only 2 weeks to hit all Iran targets

WASHINGTON, DC – US President Donald Trump has said in an interview aired yesterday that it would only take two weeks to hit "every single target" in Iran, adding that the Islamic republic was "militarily defeated."

In the interview with independent journalist Sharyl Attkisson, which was recorded last week, he also called NATO a "paper tiger" and accused Washington's allies of failing to assist in the campaign against Tehran.

The comments come as Iran is reported to have responded to the latest US proposal on ending a conflict that began on February 28 with US and Israeli strikes on Iran.

"They're militarily defeated. In their own minds, maybe they don't know that. But I think they do," Trump said in the interview, before adding: "That doesn't mean they're done."

He suggested the US military could "go in for two more weeks and do every single target. We have certain targets that we wanted, and we've done probably 70 percent of them, but we have other targets that we could conceivably hit."

"But even if we didn't do that, you know, that would just be final touches," Trump said.

On NATO, he said the alliance "has proven to be a paper tiger. They weren't there to help."

– AFP

Israeli forces operated from Iraq's desert during the war: security officials

BAGHDAD – Israeli forces established a makeshift base using an old airstrip in Iraq's desert during the war against Iran, two security officials told AFP yesterday, confirming a report by *The Wall Street Journal*.

Early in the war, which was ignited by joint US-Israeli attacks on Iran on February 28, the troops were detected in the Najaf desert in the country's southwest and clashed with Iraqi forces, killing one soldier and wounding two others.

The security official said "Israeli forces established a base in an abandoned airstrip, built by Saddam Hussein, in the Najaf desert".

"There are no longer forces there, but they may have left equipment," he said, adding that the Israeli operation "was in coordination with the US".

It was unclear how long the forces were there or what their mission was.

Iraq was drawn into the Middle East war from the outset, with strikes blamed on the US and Israel targeting Iran-backed armed groups, which in turn launched hundreds of attacks on US interests in Iraq and across the Gulf region.

Reports of foreign troops in the Najaf desert emerged early in the war after a shepherd reported seeing military activity.

On Saturday, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that "Israel set up a clandestine military outpost in the Iraqi desert to support its air campaign against Iran", quoting sources familiar with the matter including US officials.

The report said that "Israel built the installation, which housed special forces and served as a logistical hub for the Israeli air force, just before the war started with the knowledge of the US".

The Israeli military did not respond to an AFP request for comment.

Following the WSJ report, an Iraqi security spokesperson referred journalists

to a previous statement issued on March 5.

At the time, Qais al-Mohamadawi, Iraq's deputy commander of joint operations, had told state media that Iraq protested to the US-led anti-jihadist coalition stationed in the country about an air raid in Najaf.

He said that after receiving reports of "individuals or movement in the Najaf" desert, Iraq's military sent a force to investigate.

The troops came under heavy aerial fire, leaving one soldier dead and two others wounded.

Reinforcements later searched the area, but "did not find anything", Mohamadawi said.

He added that at the site in Najaf, "one force was providing support to another that was conducting reconnaissance or setting up equipment".

He said no foreign troops were authorised to be in that location.

Another security official told AFP on Sunday that there were "indications that the operation involved an Israeli technical team under American military protection".

He also confirmed that the foreign forces used an old airstrip built by Saddam, and that CH-57 Chinook helicopters were seen on the site.

"There are no longer military personnel there," though they left equipment behind, including a radar, probably used for jamming.

The site was hidden in a valley, "a location chosen carefully to avoid Iranian missile strikes", the official said.

The Najaf desert is vast and largely uninhabited, making it difficult for Iraqi forces to maintain tight security there.

The *WSJ's* sources said that Israel "deployed search-and-rescue teams there so they could respond more quickly if needed for emergency rescue missions".

– AFP

Iran war 'not over,' uranium must be removed: Netanyahu

WASHINGTON, DC – Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium must be "taken out" before the US-Israeli war against Iran can be considered over, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in an interview yesterday.

"It's not over, because there's still nuclear material – enriched uranium – that has to be taken out of Iran. There's still enrichment sites that have to be dismantled," Netanyahu said in an excerpt of an interview aired yesterday on CBS's "60 Minutes" programme.

"You go in and you take it out," the Israeli leader said when asked how the uranium could be removed.

Netanyahu said that US President Donald Trump had a similar position.

"I'm not going to talk about military means, but the president, what President Trump has said to me – 'I want to go in there.'"

However, Netanyahu's statement was in contrast to Trump's public position.

The 79-year-old Republican is under increasing domestic pressure to end the Iran war and he insists that Tehran's nuclear programme has been contained.

In an interview aired yesterday but apparently recorded earlier, Trump said Iran was "militarily

defeated" and he insisted that the uranium could be removed "whenever we want."

"We'll get that at some point, whenever we want. We'll have it surveilled," he told independent television journalist Sharyl Attkisson.

"We have that very well surveilled. If anybody got near the place we will know about it and we'll blow them up."

Asked by CBS how the uranium stockpiles could be taken out from Iran, Netanyahu said he would prefer an agreement.

"I think it can be done physically. That's not the problem. If you have an agreement and you go in and you take it out, why not? That's the best way."

Pressed on whether there are military options to seize the hidden uranium, Netanyahu said, "I'm not going to talk about our military possibilities, plans, or anything of the kind."

"I'm not going to give a timetable to it, but I am going to say that's a terrifically important mission."

In addition to the unresolved uranium stockpile issue, Netanyahu said there were several other war aims that had yet to be accomplished.

"There's still proxies that Iran supports, their ballistic missiles that they still want to produce. Now, we've degraded a lot of it, but all that is still there and there's work to be done." – AFP

No. of small boat migrants to UK tops 200,000: official figures

LONDON – More than 200,000 migrants have arrived on UK shores in small boats since records began in 2018, latest government statistics showed.

The tally comes as the anti-immigration party Reform UK surged on Thursday in local elections dominated by national issues including immigration.

Home Office figures published on Saturday showed 70 people arrived in one boat on Friday.

The northern French coast is the main point of departure for migrants hoping to reach Britain, usually risking the journey in flimsy, overcrowded boats.

Friday's crossing pushed the total number of arrivals since current data began to 200,013.

The figure is calculated using the government's official statistics for 2018 to 2025 and provisional figures recorded so far this year.

Labour Prime Minister Keir Starmer is increasingly under pressure over the issue.

His interior minister Shabana Mahmood has proposed cutting back on protections for refugees and ending automatic benefits for

asylum seekers.

At least 29 migrants died at sea attempting the crossing in 2025, according to an AFP tally based on official French and British sources. A further six people have died this year.

Britain and France last month agreed a new three-year deal in an attempt to stop undocumented migrants making the risky journey, with France pledging to ramp up law enforcement and Britain promising hundreds of millions of euros to fund the effort.

Last year a total of 41,472 migrants landed on England's southern shore after making the crossing from northern France.

The record of 45,774 arrivals was recorded in 2022 under Conservative ex-prime minister Rishi Sunak, who vowed to "stop the boats" when he was in power.

Adopting his own "smash the gangs" slogan, Starmer pledged to tackle the problem by dismantling the people smuggling networks running the crossings, but has so far had no more success than his predecessor.

– AFP

Pope condemns fresh violence in Sahel after dozens killed

VATICAN CITY – Pope Leo XIV yesterday condemned a new wave of attacks in Africa's Sahel region, particularly in Mali and Chad, after dozens of people were killed by jihadist groups.

"I have learned with concern of the reports of increasing violence in the Sahel region, particularly in Chad and Mali, which have been hit by recent terrorist attacks," said Pope Leo following his Regina Coeli prayer in St Peter's Square.

"I offer my prayers for the victims and express my solidarity with all those who are suffering. I hope that all forms of violence will

cease, and I encourage every effort toward peace and development in that beloved land."

On Saturday, security sources said dozens of people in central Mali had been killed the day before by the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM), an Al-Qaeda-linked group that had already killed at least 30 people in attacks on villages earlier on Wednesday.

In Chad, the jihadist group Boko Haram killed at least 26 army personnel last week, prompting the government on Thursday to declare a 20-day state of emergency in the Lady Chad region.

– AFP

Portugal, Spain launch cross-border project to boost rural jobs

LISBON – Portugal and Spain launched a joint project on Friday to tackle unemployment in rural border regions, with a budget of 3.2 million euros (US\$3.77 million) co-financed by the European Union (EU).

The Cross Rural Hub project was presented in Alegrete, in the Portalegre district of Portugal's Alentejo region, and will run until December 2028, Portuguese media reported last week.

Co-financed through the EU's Interreg Spain-Portugal program,

the project targets the cross-border region comprising Portugal's Alentejo and Centro regions and Spain's Extremadura autonomous community, the report said.

The project will deliver training, social innovation programs and digital and technological pilot initiatives, as well as services and infrastructure designed to attract and retain talent in low-density rural territories, with special attention to be given to young people and women, the report added.

– Xinhua

Hantavirus ship evacuees begin returning home



Passengers from the Dutch flagged hantavirus-stricken cruise ship MV Hondius are transferred by boat to the industrial port of Granadilla de Abona on the island of Tenerife in Spain's Canary Islands yesterday. – AFP

Alfons Luna

GRANADILLA DE ABONA – Occupants of a cruise ship struck by a deadly hantavirus outbreak that has sparked international alarm began arriving home from Spain's Canary Islands yesterday in a complex repatriation operation.

Three passengers from the MV Hondius – a Dutch husband and wife and a German woman – have died, while others have fallen sick with the rare disease, which usually spreads among rodents.

No vaccines or specific treatments exist for hantavirus, which is endemic in Argentina, where the ship departed in April.

But health officials have stressed that the risk for global public health is low and played down comparisons to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Spanish Health Minister Mónica García said the evacuation of most of the ship's nearly 150 passengers and crew would continue until a final repatriation flight to Australia today.

Passengers wearing blue medical suits began disembarking the Dutch-flagged vessel onto smaller boats to reach the port of Granadilla on Tenerife, AFP journalists saw.

The evacuees then boarded a red Spanish army bus and travelled to Tenerife South airport in a convoy, with a protective board separating the driver from the passengers.

The evacuees changed into new protective equipment before boarding their repatriation flights, the first of which took 14 Spaniards to Madrid, where they will observe quarantine at a military hospital.

"Everything is going well," French evacuee Roland Seitre told

AFP just before taking off, saying "everyone was great" during the disembarkation.

A plane bound for the Netherlands was taking 27 people, including Belgian, Greek, German, Guatemalan and Argentine citizens, Spanish civil protection chief Virginia Barcones told public broadcaster RTVE.

Separate flights for Turkish, British, Irish and US citizens were also scheduled for yesterday.

Race against time

Canary Islands authorities have warned that the operation must be completed by today, when adverse weather conditions will force the ship to leave.

"If everything continues according to plan... at 19:00 [7 p.m. local time] the ship will set sail for the Netherlands" today, Barcones said.

The Atlantic archipelago's regional government has consistently resisted taking in the ship, which was only authorised to anchor offshore instead of docking in the port.

But all passengers are asymptomatic and underwent a final medical assessment before their disembarkation, García told reporters on Tenerife shortly before the operation began.

Spanish authorities have insisted there will be no contact with the local population in Tenerife.

AFP journalists at Granadilla saw white tents erected along the quay and that the police, some in protective medical suits, had sealed off part of the small industrial port.

Spain "is doing what it must do,

with technical and scientific rigour and full transparency, with institutional loyalty and with international cooperation", Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez said yesterday.

International concern

The only hantavirus type that is transmissible between humans – the Andes virus – has been confirmed among those who have tested positive, fuelling international concern.

The WHO said on Friday it had confirmed six cases out of eight suspected ones. There are no suspected cases remaining on the ship.

The MV Hondius had arrived at Tenerife early on yesterday morning (local time) from Cape Verde, where three infected people had been evacuated to Europe earlier in the week.

It left Ushuaia, Argentina on April 1 for a cruise across the Atlantic Ocean to Cape Verde.

The WHO believes the first infection occurred before the start of the expedition, followed by transmission between humans onboard the vessel.

But Argentine provincial health official Juan Petrina has said there was an "almost zero chance" the Dutch man linked to the outbreak contracted the disease in Ushuaia based on the virus's weeks-long incubation period, among other factors.

Health authorities in several countries have been tracking passengers who had already disembarked and anyone who may have come into contact with them.

– AFP

Parachuting accident kills soldier in Portugal

LISBON – A Portuguese army soldier died on Thursday after sustaining injuries in a parachuting accident during a training course, the army said in a statement.

Corporal Ismael José Silva

Lamela, 23, had been hospitalized at São José Hospital in Lisbon after the accident, which occurred on Tuesday at the Parachutist Course training ground in Tancos.

A second soldier injured in the

same incident remains hospitalized in Leiria, in the Central Region of Portugal.

An investigation has been launched to determine the full circumstances of the accident.

– Xinhua

Lula, Trump hail positive talks after rocky relations

Danny Kemp and Fran Blandy

WASHINGTON, DC – President Donald Trump and his Brazilian counterpart Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva on Thursday hailed a positive three-hour meeting in Washington, as the ideological opposites sought to smooth tensions.

Leftist Lula, 80, who grew up dirt poor, and right-wing billionaire Trump, 79, have clashed before over everything from tariffs to Trump's bid to exert US dominance over the Americas.

However, both men beamed in photos after a meeting that dragged long past its scheduled time, as they worked to find common ground on thorny issues affecting the two biggest economies in the Americas.

“Just concluded my meeting with Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the very dynamic President of Brazil. We discussed many topics, including Trade and, specifically, Tariffs. The meeting went very well,” Trump said on his Truth Social network.

Despite sometimes prickly diplomatic ties, Trump has often spoken warmly of the charismatic leftist.

Lula said he was “very, very satisfied” with the meeting.

“I always feel that a photograph is worth a great deal. And you surely noticed that President Trump smiling is better than him looking grumpy.”

Tense Brazilian election

The lengthy meeting came as a boost for Lula, who is facing a tight election in October against Flávio Bolsonaro – the son of former far-right president Jair Bolsonaro, a close Trump ally.

The veteran leftist is seeking a fourth, non-consecutive term in office.

Trump hit Brazil with steep tariffs on all its products in July as punishment for what he called a “witch hunt” against Jair Bolsonaro – now serving a 27-year prison sentence for an attempted coup.

Those tariffs were eased after the two leaders held a first meeting in Malaysia and established diplomatic contact.



Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva speaks during a press conference on Thursday at the Brazilian Embassy after his White House meeting with US President Donald Trump in Washington, DC, earlier that day. – AFP

Lula said he did not believe that Trump would “have any influence on the Brazilian elections.”

“I think he will conduct himself like a president of the United States, allowing the Brazilian people to decide their own destiny,” said Lula.

Lula once said that Trump wants to be “emperor of the world,” and has slammed the US removal of Venezuela’s Nicolás Maduro and the war it launched alongside Israel against Iran.

He told journalists that the US leader “isn’t going to change his personality just because of a three-hour meeting with me. What I made a point of telling him was my perspective on things I believe far more in dialogue than in war.”

“He thinks the war [in Iran] is already over. That’s not the reality. But that’s what he thinks and, you know, I’m not going to sit there arguing with him over his view of the war.

“He thinks everything in Venezuela is all sorted out.”

Lula said he had cracked a joke with Trump, asking him not to revoke the visas for Brazil’s football team before the World Cup because “we’re coming here to win.”

“He laughed,” said Lula.

UN reform, organised crime

Lula said he discussed the reform and expansion of the UN Security Council at length.

Security is the main concern of Brazilian voters ahead of the election and Lula and Trump discussed at length efforts to combat organized crime and customs cooperation.

The two governments in April signed a deal to share information to combat arms and drug trafficking, such as X-ray data on containers traveling from the United States to Brazil.

Lula said Brazil was “prepared to form a working group comprising all the countries of Latin America and, perhaps, all the countries of the world, in order to create a powerful coalition to combat organized crime.”

The two men also discussed Brazil’s vast reserves of rare earth minerals – crucial for the production of high-tech goods – which Washington is scrambling to invest in.

The country holds the second-largest reserves of the critical elements in the world after China.

Later on Wednesday, Brazilian lawmakers advanced a bill that would incentivize mineral exploitation. It will next be debated in the Senate.

“We have no particular preferences. Our objective is to forge partnerships – to collaborate with American, Chinese, German, Japanese, French, or any other companies – that wish to join forces with us to facilitate mining operations, process these materials, and generate the wealth that these rare earth elements offer us,” said Lula.

– AFP

Brazilian court suspends law aimed at reducing Bolsonaro sentence

BRASÍLIA – A Brazilian Supreme Court justice on Saturday suspended implementation of a law that could reduce the prison sentence of former far-right president Jair Bolsonaro until legal challenges against it are heard, according to a document obtained by AFP.

Justice Alexandre de Moraes ordered the suspension of the law until the Supreme Court holds a full hearing on appeals challenging its “constitutionality,” the document said.

In September, Bolsonaro was sentenced to 27 years in prison by the Supreme Court, which found him guilty of conspiring to remain in power despite his 2022 electoral defeat to leftist President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

The law, passed in December by the conservative-majority Congress, was blocked by Lula the following month.

However, lawmakers led by Bolsonaro’s allies overturned the presidential veto in late April, and the measure was finally enacted on Friday.

The new law, which applies to all those convicted like Bolsonaro for coup plotting, is intended to reduce the waiting period for sentence reductions, potentially significantly reducing prison terms.

However, defense attorneys of those convicted must file a request for the Supreme Court to recalculate the terms of sentence reductions on a case-by-case basis.

In practical terms, Moraes’s order on Saturday suspends the review of these cases until the full Supreme Court meets to decide whether the law is constitutional, after being petitioned by left-wing parties.

The sentence reductions provided for by the law are also intended to benefit those convicted of participating in riots on January 8, 2023, when a mob of Bolsonaro supporters ransacked government buildings in Brasilia, a week after Lula’s inauguration.

According to the Supreme Court, this assault was an integral part of the coup plot.

Bolsonaro, 71, is currently serving his sentence under house arrest for health reasons.

On Friday, his lawyers filed a new appeal, asking the Supreme Court to overturn his conviction in order to “rectify a miscarriage of justice.”

The former president, who was in office from 2019 to 2022 and has been barred from running again, has designated his eldest son Flávio as his political successor to contest the October election against Lula, who is seeking a fourth term at age 80.

“He should have been our presidential candidate,” the 45-year-old senator said of his father at a Saturday event with political allies where he promised to “retire Lula.”

Recent polls show Lula and Flávio Bolsonaro neck-and-neck.

– AFP

Brazil to grant visa-free entry to Chinese citizens

BRASÍLIA – The Brazilian government announced on Thursday that it will implement a visa-free entry policy for Chinese citizens holding ordinary passports, starting today. – Xinhua

Chinese medical team provides free outreach services in Mozambique

MAPUTO – The 26th Chinese medical team dispatched to Mozambique completed a five-day outreach service mission last week in the southeast African nation’s southern Gaza Province, including medical consultations and health education for local residents.

The mission ran from last Monday to Friday in Gaza’s Bilene-Macia district, with over 260 cases treated, drugs in 11 categories distributed free of charge, and health consultations and guidance provided for some 260 people.

The free service mission, supported by portable medical devices such as blood pressure monitors, blood glucose meters and pulse oximeters, was in part focused on the on-site diagnosis and treatment of common and chronic diseases, including hypertension, diabetes, osteoarticular disorders, and gynecological diseases.

Targeting regional threats like

malaria and cholera, the team educated locals on hygiene and disease prevention while distributing informational pamphlets.

Also, the team provided emergency response training for local healthcare workers through lectures and hands-on demonstrations, such as cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) techniques.

Antônio Daniel, a local doctor attending the training courses, said the guidance was very practical.

“We learned many new skills and techniques that we can share with our colleagues and use to better serve local communities in the future,” he said.

Chen Jialei, head of the 26th Chinese medical team to Mozambique, said the activities delivered quality healthcare services to underserved populations in Mozambique, and helped raise public awareness of infectious disease prevention. – Xinhua, MPD

Brazil enacts deal to ease trade within Mercosul

RIO DE JANEIRO – Brazil on Friday enacted an agreement designed to streamline trade with other members of the Southern Common Market (Mercosur/Mercosul) trade bloc, including Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay.

The Mercosul Trade Facilitation Agreement makes trade between bloc members easier and faster by promoting standardized procedures, electronic documentation, simplified customs rules, greater regulatory transparency, and strengthened cooperation between border authorities.

Measures outlined in the agreement aim to expedite the clearance of goods through customs,

especially perishable products, and promote the Single Window for Foreign Trade, a digital platform for submitting documents, such as certificates of origin and sanitary certificates.

According to the Brazilian government, the agreement will cut costs and processing times for trade operations, and offer greater legal certainty to exporters and importers, especially micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises.

Any future revisions to the agreement or additional financial commitments will continue to be subject to the approval of Brazil’s National Congress, the

government said.

The decree was published in the Official Gazette and signed by Vice President Geraldo Alckmin, serving as acting president during President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva’s trip to the United States.

Mercosul members signed the agreement in December 2019 and the document was later approved by the Brazilian legislature in September 2023.

Mercosur and Mercosul are the six-nation’s bloc’s acronyms in Spanish and Portuguese, respectively. Venezuela’s membership has been suspended since December 1, 2016.

– Xinhua, MPD

Anxiety, anticipation as World Cup 1-month countdown begins

Rob Woollard



LOS ANGELES – The one-month countdown to the 2026 World Cup gets under way today with anticipation crashing into anxiety as soaring ticket prices, political tensions in Donald Trump's America and the war in Iran cast an early shadow over the football showpiece.

A record 48 teams and millions of fans are set to descend on the United States, Canada and Mexico for the first ever World Cup co-hosted by three nations.

The sprawling, nearly six-week-long spectacle kicks off at Mexico City's iconic Estadio Azteca on June 11 before culminating in the final at New Jersey's 82,500-seat MetLife Stadium on July 19.

Yet a turbulent build-up has meant the 23rd edition of the World Cup risks feeling like a morning-after headache before the party has even started, with a potent cocktail of affordability concerns, politics and conflict already souring the mood.

FIFA President Gianni Infantino insists the pre-tournament unease is overblown, dismissing the tide of downbeat headlines as "negative press."

"The truth of the matter is that it's very difficult to find something negative around this World Cup," Infantino told a business conference in Beverly Hills this week.

But Infantino's bullish optimism has not been broadly shared around the football world.

'Extortionate' tickets

The skyrocketing cost of tickets for the

tournament has triggered a global backlash which has left FIFA and Infantino scrambling to manage the public relations fallout.

Fan organisation Football Supporters Europe (FSE) has branded the World Cup pricing structure as "extortionate" and a "monumental betrayal", citing ticket prices that have put the tournament - expected to help generate US\$13 billion for FIFA - out of reach for many.

The most expensive ticket for the final in 2022 cost around US\$1,600 at face value; in 2026 the most expensive face value ticket being sold by FIFA now weighs in at an eye-watering US\$32,970.

Infantino says the prices are appropriate for the United States, which will host the bulk of the tournament's fixtures.

"We have to look at the market - we are in the market in which entertainment is the most developed in the world. So we have to apply market rates," Infantino said.

FIFA has reported more than 500 million requests for tickets, compared to 50 million combined for the 2018 and 2022 tournaments.

However, despite claims that the tournament is a sellout, seats for many games - including the United States' opener against Paraguay in Los Angeles on June 12 - remain available on secondary ticket market sites.

Even staunch Infantino ally Trump has balked at the cost, reacting with surprise this week when informed of the US\$1,000 price tag for the USA clash with Paraguay.

"I did not know that number," Trump

told the *New York Post*. "I would certainly like to be there, but I wouldn't pay it either, to be honest with you."

'Exclusion and fear'?

As fans mull the cost of watching the World Cup, other critics have zeroed in on the feverish political climate in the United States, which is hosting 78 of the tournament's 104 games.

The re-election of Trump to the White House has upended the 2026 tournament's initial billing as a "Unity Bid" that would showcase the harmonious relationship between the three North American co-hosts.

Since returning to office, Trump has repeatedly talked about making Canada a "51st state" of the United States while launching a trade war with both neighbours.

Human Rights Watch has said the World Cup risks being defined by "exclusion and fear" due to Trump's crackdowns on immigration, demonstrations and press freedom, while Amnesty International warned the tournament could become a "stage for repression."

The US-Israel military strikes launched against Iran in February meanwhile have sent shockwaves through the global economy, with the World Bank warning the conflict in the Middle East could tip millions into hunger.

'Iran will play'

The war also sparked uncertainty about Iran's participation in the World Cup. It is the first time in history a host has been in a military conflict with a participating nation

directly before the tournament.

Trump initially suggested Iran withdraw from the tournament, for their "own life and safety."

However, FIFA supremo Infantino is adamant that Iran, who are scheduled to play their three group matches in the United States having seen their proposal that they be moved to Mexico rejected, will take part as planned.

"Of course Iran will be participating at the FIFA World Cup 2026," Infantino told the FIFA Congress in Vancouver on April 30.

"And of course, Iran will play [in] the United States of America."

Trump, who hopes to reap political dividends from the World Cup ahead of this year's midterm elections, subsequently said he was "OK" with Iran's presence at the World Cup.

FIFA and Infantino are banking on the controversies being forgotten when the on-field action gets under way and the World Cup serves up its trademark feast of drama and footballing brilliance.

Defending champions Argentina and Lionel Messi head into the tournament among the favourites, alongside European champions Spain, 2018 World Cup winners France and England, desperately chasing a first major tournament win since 1966.

At the other end of the scale, the expanded World Cup will welcome several nations for the first time, notably Curacao - the smallest country by population to ever play in the tournament - and Cape Verde.

– AFP

Arsenal survive VAR drama to move closer to title with dramatic win at West Ham

Steven Griffiths

LONDON – Arsenal moved closer to the Premier League title in controversial fashion as a hugely contentious decision to disallow Callum Wilson's stoppage-time goal handed the leaders a vital 1-0 win against West Ham yesterday.

Mikel Arteta's side struggled to break down West Ham in a tense derby at the London Stadium before Leandro Trossard struck with a deflected effort seven minutes from full-time.

But Arsenal's title rivals Manchester City will be furious that West Ham were denied a last-gasp equaliser for Pablo's foul on Gunners keeper David Raya, whose fumble was fired home by Wilson.

Pablo had his arm across Raya's chest in the incident but the contact was minimal, with West Ham also claiming fouls by Declan Rice and Trossard at the same moment.

In what could be the defining image of the title race, referee Chris Kavanagh and the VAR officials took an age to disallow the goal, with the verdict eventually sparking outraged jeers from West Ham fans, while Arteta clenched his fists in relief.

Arsenal are five points clear of second-placed City, whose 3-0 win against Brentford on Saturday had kept the pressure on the leaders.

City can close within two points of Arsenal if they win their game in hand at home to Crystal Palace on Wednesday.

But Arsenal know they are guaranteed to seal the title if they win their last two games against Burnley and Crystal Palace.

The Gunners' mental strength has been questioned numerous times in recent years, but they showed spirit and desire in equal measure to edge ever closer to a long-awaited first title in 22 years.

Arsenal have also reached their first Champions League final since 2006, beating Atletico Madrid in the last four on Tuesday, and will face Paris Saint-Germain in the final



Arsenal's Spanish goalkeeper David Raya saves a shot from West Ham United's Argentinian striker Valentin Castellanos (not pictured) during the English Premier League match between West Ham United and Arsenal at the London Stadium, in east London yesterday. – AFP

in Budapest on May 30.

Winning their 14th English title and a maiden Champions League crown would make it the greatest season in the club's 139-year history.

Thierry Henry, a key figure in the unbeaten "Invincibles" side who were the last Arsenal team to win the title in 2003-04, recently said Arteta's squad would be known as the "unforgettables" if they lift both trophies.

For the thousands of Arsenal supporters crammed into one end of the London Stadium, this was a result they will never forget if the title is secured over the next two weeks.

Arsenal on brink of immortality

Third-bottom West Ham's hopes of avoiding relegation are fading.

They are one point behind fourth-bottom Tottenham, who can take a huge step towards

survival if they beat host Leeds today.

Trossard went close for Arsenal from an early corner, his close-range header well saved by Mads Hermansen before the winger headed the rebound onto the crossbar.

Arsenal suffered a blow when Ben White limped off midway through the half, forcing Rice to move from midfield to a makeshift right-back role.

After being penned in for so long, West Ham were inches away from taking a shock lead just before half-time.

Valentin Castellanos threw himself at Aaron Wan-Bissaka's cross with a diving header that Raya saved at full stretch.

Arsenal had lost control of the game with Rice out of position and Arteta responded at the break, sending on Cristhian Mosquera so the England star could return to midfield.

Even that couldn't shift the momentum back in Arsenal's favour.

Raya made a brilliant save to keep Arsenal level, sticking out his foot to block Mateus Fernandes' shot after the midfielder looked certain to score from five yards.

It was a priceless contribution as Arsenal netted in the 83rd minute.

Martin Odegaard played a one-two with Rice and cleverly worked the pass into Trossard, whose strike from 12 yards took a hefty deflection on its way past Hermansen.

There was nearly a sting in the tale for Arsenal when Raya's drop was lashed in by Wilson, but VAR came to the Gunners' rescue, leaving them three wins from immortality.

The Spurs vs Leeds game is being played at 3 a.m. tomorrow morning Macau time.

– AFP/MPD

China edges Japan for 7th straight women's title at table tennis team worlds

Table tennis

LONDON – China claimed its seventh straight women's title at the ITTF World Team Table Tennis Championships Finals, rallying past Japan in a five-match thriller yesterday in the 2026 edition.

It also marked a record-extending 24th time that China has lifted the Corbillon Cup, with its latest title run beginning from the 2012 edition in Dortmund.

In their sixth straight final clash in the tournament, the two sides lived up to expectations, as China came back twice to stand on the top podium.

"We are happy to win, but the process was similar to that in Busan two years ago. Japan shows its overall strength and flexible lineup, also boasting a comprehensive set of styles of play," world No. 1 Sun Yingsha said after the win. "Just believe in myself, and in my teammates."

The opening match between Wang Manyu and Miwa Harimoto set the stage for an enthralling duel, with Harimoto constantly attacking Wang's forehand at the opening stages to take a two-game lead with 11-4, 11-9.

Wang recovered from her slow start, winning 11-6, 11-4 to level the tie.

But Harimoto regained control in the decider, triumphing 11-4 to hand Japan the lead.

Sun restored parity for China with an 11-7, 11-7, 11-8 victory over Hina Hayata, extending her advantage in their longtime rivalry to 19-0.



Sun Yingsha poses with the Diane Scholer award at the award ceremony for the Women's Teams final at the ITTF World Table Tennis Championships in Wembley Arena, west London yesterday. – AFP

With the score tied at 1-1, the third match proved pivotal. With her defensive play, Honoka Hashimoto moved Japan ahead again after defeating Kuai Man 11-6, 5-11, 11-6, 11-8.

"Competing in the team worlds for the first time, I've gained a lot, while having some problems as well. I have a clearer understanding of playing against choppers and making quick adjustments on the court," Kuai said.

In a clash of the two teams' top players, Sun and Harimoto traded rapid rallies for most of the match, where Sun emerged victorious 11-2, 11-4, 11-6 as China forced a decider.

Stepping on the court again, Wang swept Hayata 11-7, 11-7,

11-5 to complete the comeback.

"After I lost the first match, Shasha (Sun) stepped up, like she did in Busan. She offered me a chance of redemption for myself," Wang noted.

"I had some comfortable wins in the past matches. But facing Harimoto, I could feel the challenge from young players. For me, the fifth match also deserved summing up," she added.

After winning all of her nine matches, Sun was awarded the tournament's best female player.

On her personal honor, Sun said, "It's a recognition of my efforts. But there is a way to go. It will motivate me to keep working hard." –Xinhua

England eye another Women's Six Nations Grand Slam after Italy rout

Julian Guyer



LONDON – Veteran flanker Marlie Packer scored four of England's nine tries as they hammered Italy 61-33 in Parma on Saturday to maintain their iron grip on the Women's Six Nations.

The world champions extended their record unbeaten run to 37 games and will head into next weekend's decider away to France bidding for an eighth straight Six Nations title and fifth consecutive Grand Slam.

England allowed their opponents a bonus point for a second straight match with Italy scoring five tries.

Zoe Harrison's perfect run of 18 successful conversions came to an end when she failed to add the extras to Mia Venner's try, although the England fly-half was still on target with eight of her nine efforts.

John Mitchell's side ran in six tries before half-time to lead 40-19 at the break, with Packer and hooker Amy Cokayne both scoring twice as their forward power proved too much for Italy.

"I take my hat off to the pack, they were unreal," former England captain Packer told the BBC.

"All week we have been practising our set pieces and me and Amy were the lucky ones to dot the ball down but it was all of the girls' hard work."

Such is England's dominance, Italy prop Silvia Turani was still pleased by her side's efforts.

"The result is a different story but I think at times you have to take performance over results," she said.

Helena Rowland, lining up alongside England captain Megan Jones in midfield, marked her 50th cap with a try.

Despite missing more than a dozen players due to pregnancy, injury or post-World Cup retirement, England had cruised through their opening three games, beating Ireland before hammering Scotland and Wales.

They suffered another setback shortly before Saturday's kick-off when back-row Maddie Feaunati was ruled out with a leg injury.

England still scored five tries in the opening quarter as they surged into a 33-5 lead against semi-professional Italy.

Italy hooker Vittoria Vecchini pulled a try back before Cokayne scored her second.

The hosts reduced England's lead to 33-12 with a penalty try after a deliberate knock-on by Ellie Kildunne, before the 36-year-old Packer crossed Italy's line again.

Abi Burton and Packer added further tries early in the second half before Italy secured a bonus point through Francesca Sgorbini's breakaway score, the replacement also going over in the final minute.

'Job done' for France against Scotland

France thrashed Scotland 69-28 later Saturday to stay in title contention, the visitors scoring 11 tries in Edinburgh including doubles for Siobhan Soqeta and Lea Champon.

Manae Feleu, the France captain, opened the scoring in under a minute and team-mate Ambre Mwayembe wrapped things up with a try in the last play of the game after Rachel Philipps' double on her first international start sent Scotland on their way to a bonus point.

"I think the job has been done here today [Saturday] and now we have many things to fix during the week but it is (nearly) 70 points so we can be happy," said France coach Francois Ratier.

Ireland completed the fourth round with a decisive 33-12 bonus-point win over Wales in Belfast, Aoife Wafer scoring two of their five tries ahead of next week's home finale against Scotland in Dublin.

"We thoroughly enjoyed that tonight and we spoke about winning all three home games and we are two for two," said Wafer, whose side beat Italy 57-20 in a second-round match in Galway.

Wales remain firmly rooted to the bottom of the table following a fourth straight defeat, with the Welsh completing their tournament against Italy at Cardiff Arms Park.

– AFP

Sport in brief

Jorge Martin wins French MotoGP and Ogura ends Japan's drought

MotoGP

LE MANS – Jorge Martin overtook MotoGP championship leader Marco Bezzecchi on the penultimate lap to win the French Grand Prix yesterday, while Ai Ogura secured Japan's first podium finish for 14 years.

Italian rider Bezzecchi seemed to be heading for his fourth win of a season which is only five races old when Spaniard Martin nipped in front of him on the 26th lap of 27.

The Spaniard, world champion in 2024, stood up in his saddle with his arms aloft as he crossed the line to record his first victory of the season.

Ogura finished third to become the first Japanese rider to finish on a MotoGP podium since Katsuyuki Nakasuga at the Valencia Grand Prix in 2012.

Martin's performance cut the lead on his Aprilia teammate Bezzecchi in the championship standings to a single point after he picked up additional points by winning the sprint race on Saturday.

"I rode a great race," Martin said.

Bezzecchi was gracious in defeat. "It was a very tough race. and I knew it wasn't the strongest today. So, I am very happy (with the result)," the Italian said.

Ogura's first podium of his career after a gutsy ride moves the 25-year-old Trackhouse rider up to fifth place in the riders' standings. – AFP

French rookie Magnier wins his second stage of Giro d'Italia

Cycling

SOFIA – Paul Magnier showed nous beyond his years by snatching victory at Sofia in the third stage

of the Giro d'Italia to pip Italian hope Jonathan Milan and Dylan Groenewegen.

The 22-year-old Quick-Step rider also won the opening stage Friday and was dressed in the colours of the leading sprinter in what is his debut Giro.

Milan opened his sprint early with Magnier sitting on his wheel until the line where he made a bike throw, a manoeuvre in which he pushed his weight off the back of the saddle to propel the bike 30 centimetres forwards.

"Now I know I can compete with the best," said Magnier, after his second win.

The 175km run from Plovdiv along the magnificent Maritsa river to the Bulgarian capital took the peloton over the 9.2km Borovec Pass climb where King of the Mountains jersey wearer Diego Pablo Sevilla led a three-man break that was only captured and overtaken 300m from the finish line.

Team UAE set off three riders down already, a heavy toll from the carnage of Saturday's mass fall that deprived them of Adam Yates, Jay Vine and Marc Soler, all potential contenders for the title.

Another favourite, Colombian Santiago Buitrago, also had to withdraw leaving Jonas Vingegaard looking even at this early stage ever more likely to win the 21-day event.

Today is a rest and travel day before stage 4 tomorrow for a picture postcard coastal run in the Abruzzo region where Uruguayan Guillermo Silva will ride in the overall leader's pink jersey.

Vingegaard will have to wait until stage seven for a first real mountain with a near 14km climb up Mount Blockhaus in the Apennines.

Stage 10 should also cause a shake up with a lengthy 42km time-trial between Viareggio and Massa. – AFP



Japan's Naomi Osaka plays a forehand return to Russia's Diana Shnaider during their singles match at the WTA Rome Open tennis tournament at Foro Italico in Rome yesterday. Osaka won the game 6-1, 6-2. – AFP

Turkey show displays photo master Ara Güler's Cannes shots

Fulya Ozerkan

ISTANBUL – One shot shows Sophia Loren lifting a champagne glass beneath the adoring gaze of fans. In another frame, Brigitte Bardot lies carefree in the countryside in a T-shirt and jeans.

Frozen in time yet alive with glamour and spontaneity, these moments are part of a new exhibition in Istanbul featuring previously unseen shots by Turkey's legendary Magnum photographer Ara Güler at the Cannes Film Festival.

Dubbed the "Eye of Istanbul" by fans, Güler was famed for his iconic black-and-white images that captured the soul of the Turkish city.

He also regularly covered the world's top film festival on the French Riviera between 1957 and 1967.

"Beyond the award ceremonies and red carpets, Ara Güler also captured what unfolded behind the scenes: lavish parties, intimate gatherings and even a luncheon held in honour of Sophia Loren," said Cagla Sarac, the art advisor for Dogus Group, a leading business group that founded the Ara Güler Museum.

"The result is a remarkably complete portrait of the festival, revealing not just its glamour, but the full human story surrounding it," she told AFP.

His Cannes festival shots are on display until October 11 at the museum in Istanbul, opened in 2018, two months before his death on his 90th birthday.

Next to the museum, a team of experts continues to work meticulously on his vast archives, preserving the legacy of Turkey's photography master.

"There are countless remarkable



A woman looks at a photo of Italian actress Sophia Loren (centre), taken by legendary Turkish photojournalist Ara Güler during the Cannes Film Festival, at the Ara Güler Museum in Istanbul, Turkey, on Thursday. Frozen in time yet alive with all the glamour and spontaneity: all those moments are part of a newly opened exhibition featuring previously unseen photographs taken by Güler at the Cannes Film Festival between 1957 and 1967. – AFP

photographs in his archive, and with every exhibition we hope to bring new frames to light," Sarac said.

Passion for cinema

Traces of Güler's lifelong devotion to cinema can even be found in his teenage diaries from the late 1940s and 1950s, according to Temel Yilmaz, conservator and archive researcher.

"In his high school diaries, we keep seeing the same line over and over again: 'I didn't go to school today,'" he said with a smile. "Because he had gone to the cinema instead".

In a wide-ranging career, he also photographed famous personalities including Salvador Dali, Alfred Hitchcock, and Winston Churchill.

Born to an Armenian family in Istanbul, Güler attended an Armenian school there and began

working as a photographer on Turkish newspaper *Yeni Istanbul*.

He got his first big international chance as a photographer in 1958 when US magazine *Time-Life* opened a Turkey office.

He then met the likes of photographers Marc Riboud and Henri Cartier-Bresson who signed him up to join the celebrated photo agency Magnum.

'Genuine portraits'

"He looked at everything through the lens of news value, always trying to document, always searching for a new story," recalled Alin Tasciyan, a film critic who has followed the Cannes Film Festival since 2002 and who knew Güler.

What stands out in his archive, Tasciyan told AFP, is his ability to see beyond the surface.



A staff member restores slides, taken by Turkish photojournalist Ara Güler, at the Ara Güler Museum in Istanbul on Thursday. – AFP



This photo taken on Thursday shows a press card used by Turkish photojournalist Ara Güler during the Cannes Film Festival, displayed at the Ara Güler Museum in Istanbul. Frozen in time yet alive with all the glamour and spontaneity: all those moments are part of a newly opened exhibition featuring previously unseen photographs taken by Güler at the Cannes Film Festival between 1957 and 1967. – AFP

"When I look at the photographs, I see the moments Ara Güler captured – sailors arriving on boats. He would walk through the streets and beaches of Cannes, observe what was happening."

For Güler, photography was about truth rather than spectacle, she said.

"He really photographed the spirit of the time, the spirit of the place. In this exhibition, I saw how much he could extract from a place I know so well," she said.

"I also saw his humour – he was a very funny man. He would suddenly crack a joke at the most unexpected moment". – AFP

AI can't replace doggie actors, film director says

Paula Ramon

LAS VEGAS – When director Robert Vince was filming "Air Bud Returns," he was impressed to see Roscoe, his four-legged star, improvising concern in a scene where two humans burst into tears.

"He's curious to what's going on," Vince told AFP. "This is real."

Having done more than a dozen productions featuring dogs, Vince says he is still impressed by the authenticity that animal actors bring to film sets.

For him, the magic of a canine performer cannot ever be replicated by artificial intelligence (AI).

"You look at how much joy

this dog, and human actors, give you, right?" he says, gesturing to Roscoe the golden retriever star of "Air Bud Returns," who is wearing a T-shirt and basketball shoes, still boundlessly enthusiastic despite greeting fans for hours.

Vince, 64, says that every technological innovation initially causes a stir and sparks curiosity among audiences.

But wizardry can only wow for so long before audiences see through it and start looking to the fundamentals again.

"I remember when visual effects really [appeared], everybody was like: 'Oh, those are so cool. We're gonna

do a million superhero movies."

"After a while, it's like: 'Oh, I've seen that before,'" he said. "It's really about your emotional connection to the characters. There's an authenticity to this type of filmmaking that does not go away."

Sports bark

"Air Bud Returns," slated for release in US cinemas next year, is the latest chapter in a franchise that began in 1997 featuring a runaway circus dog who has an extraordinary ability to play basketball.

Subsequent instalments took in other popular sports, including American football ("Air Bud: Golden Receiver,"), soccer ("Air Bud: World Pup") and baseball ("Air Bud: Seventh Inning Fetch.")

For Vince, who spoke with AFP at the recent CinemaCon convention in Las Vegas, the audience reception to news of the latest production, which sees the canine hero back on the basketball court, has been "overwhelming."

"But I can't say I'm surprised," he added.

"We know from social media... that this movie was basically being begged to be made."

He says that's because "Air Bud" is a quintessential family

film, one that a whole generation remembers from childhood.

"People that grew up with ("Air Bud") ... are millennials that were 10 years old when they saw the original one.

"They are now parents, and they have kids of their own."

And, of course, a cute-as-a-button golden retriever who can shoot hoops as well as he can act is always going to hit the mark, he said.

"It's all dog, all the time," he said of Roscoe's balling talents.

"We have an audience that grew up with the original "Air Bud" movie where there was no CGI [computer

generated imagery]," Vince said.

"And so we kept that promise in this movie as well."

At a time that Hollywood is grappling with the job-killing effects of AI – and as the organisers of the Oscars and the Golden Globes have said avatars can't win prizes – Vince says he's confident the new technology will never displace the warmth of a real-life performer, human or animal.

"Despite what everybody wants you to believe, I don't really believe it's happening," he said.

"You don't get any emotion out of that." – AFP

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 16°C~31°C	Manila 24°C~36°C	New York 9°C~18°C	Lisbon 13°C~20°C
Shanghai 18°C~31°C	Bangkok 26°C~34°C	London 4°C~13°C	Rio de Janeiro 19°C~21°C
Hong Kong 21°C~27°C	Tokyo 14°C~24°C	Frankfurt 4°C~14°C	Luanda 21°C~27°C
Taipei 22°C~28°C	Singapore 25°C~33°C	Vancouver 11°C~19°C	Maputo 15°C~30°C
Guangzhou 21°C~29°C	Kuala Lumpur 24°C~33°C	Paris 5°C~15°C	Dili 25°C~32°C
Nanjing 18°C~31°C	Jakarta 24°C~34°C	Moscow 10°C~15°C	São Tomé 25°C~33°C
Guilin 19°C~26°C	Seoul 15°C~22°C	Las Vegas 23°C~39°C	Praia 20°C~27°C
Xi'an 18°C~35°C	Sydney 15°C~21°C	Monte Carlo 14°C~23°C	Bissau 21°C~36°C



Roscoe, portraying Buddy the dog, and Canadian director producer Robert Vince promote "Air Bud Returns" during CinemaCon at Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas, Nevada, on April 15, 2026. – AFP



1. Serious dressing

Cosplayers pose during Thessaloniki Comic Convention "The Comic Con vol.10", where hundreds of Greek and foreign creators from the fields of comics, cosplay, cinema and television, animation and gaming (video, board and card games) bring the public into contact with the newest "playing", in Thessaloniki on Saturday.

- AFP

2. Serious business

A Pakistani Hindu bride looks on during a mass marriage ceremony organised by the Cutchi Maheshwari Welfare Association in Karachi on Friday.

- AFP

3. How do I get in?

A bear smells a fruit ice brick on a hot afternoon at the Veermata Jijabai Bhosale Udyan and Zoo in Mumbai, India yesterday.

- AFP



6



4. Formidable opponent

A security guard sits next to a display featuring Chinese literary and religious figure 'Sun Wukong' also known as the Monkey King, during the Mumbai Comic Con 2026 festival in Mumbai on Saturday.

- AFP

5. Autumn gold

People enjoy the autumn scenery in Canberra, Australia, on Friday.

- Xinhua

6. On the head!

Participants pose with footballs on their head before preparing rujak uleg, a traditional Indonesian savoury salad that features beef muzzel and vegetables, during the "History of Rujak Uleg Festival" to welcome the upcoming 2026 FIFA World Cup in Surabaya, Indonesia on Saturday.

- AFP