

Xi, Putin hail 'new stage' of ties

BEIJING – President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday hailed a “new stage” in bilateral ties as they agreed to further extend a China-Russia friendship treaty and pledged to work together for a more just and equitable world order.

Putin’s two-day state visit marked his 25th trip to China. Xi and Putin held talks, chatted over tea, visited a photo exhibition, and witnessed the signing of a slew of cooperation documents in Beijing.

Amid a fluid and turbulent international landscape, the two countries have developed a comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era based on equality, mutual respect, good faith and win-win cooperation, Xi noted during their talks.

Political mutual trust has further deepened, cooperation in trade, investment, energy, science and technology, and people-to-people and sub-national exchanges has steadily advanced, while the bonds between the two peoples have grown stronger, he added.

“The China-Russia relationship has entered a new stage of greater achievements and faster development,” he said.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the China-Russia strategic partnership of coordination and the 25th anniversary of the signing of the China-Russia Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation.

The treaty established by law the institutional foundation for long-term good-neighborliness, friendship and comprehensive strategic coordination between the two countries, according to the Chinese president.

Since it was signed, bilateral relations have achieved leapfrog development, Xi said.

As the two presidents agreed on the treaty’s further extension, Putin said it has become increasingly relevant under current circumstances.

Putin said Russia-China relations have reached an “unprecedented level” through the joint efforts of both sides, characterized



President Xi Jinping (right) shakes hands with Russian President Vladimir Putin during talks at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. – Xinhua

by close high-level exchanges and strong political mutual trust.

Russia-China relations have withstood tests and grown stronger over time, becoming a paradigm of comprehensive strategic coordination, he said.

Practical Cooperation

Reaffirming the enduring ties, Xi said unswervingly promoting the long-term, sound, steady and high-quality development of the China-Russia relationship is a strategic

choice by the two sides based on the fundamental interests of the two countries and the global trends.

He said both countries should upgrade practical cooperation in trade, investment, energy, transportation and scientific and technological innovation, expand cooperation in frontier fields, and foster new growth drivers.

According to the Ministry of Commerce, trade between the two countries exceeded US\$200 billion for the third consecutive year in 2025. China has remained Russia’s largest

trading partner for 16 years in a row.

Xi also called on both sides to carry forward the traditional friendship between the two peoples, expand exchanges in education, culture, film, tourism and sports, and strengthen public support for friendship.

This year marks the launch of the China-Russia Years of Education, which is the 10th national theme year of the two countries. The two presidents attended the opening ceremony yesterday.

Continued on p.6

US indicts former Cuban president Raúl Castro

MIAMI – The United States yesterday indicted Cuba’s former president Raúl Castro as Washington called on the island’s people to embrace a “new path.”

An indictment unsealed in a federal court in Florida charged the influential former president over the 1996 downing of two civilian planes manned by anti-Castro pilots.

Castro, brother of Fidel Castro, the late iconic US nemesis who led the 1959 communist revolution, was charged with murder, conspiracy to kill Americans, and destruction of aircraft.

The charges added fuel to speculation that President Donald Trump intends to topple the Cuban government.

Trump previously seized on a US

domestic indictment to justify military action in January that toppled and seized Venezuela’s then president Nicolás Maduro, a staunch ally of the Cuban authorities.

Four people died in the 1996 downing of planes, sending relations plummeting. Two decades later, Raúl Castro joined then US president Barack Obama in an effort to reconcile.

But Trump reversed Obama’s effort to improve relations.

Trump has repeatedly signaled that the Cuban government could be next after Venezuela to fall, and earlier this month even said Washington would be “taking over” the Caribbean island, about 145 km from Florida, “almost immediately.”

– AFP

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Israeli lawmakers advance bill to dissolve parliament

Israeli lawmakers voted yesterday to advance a bill submitted by the ruling coalition of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu which would dissolve parliament and pave the way for early elections. – *Story on p. 10*

Syria’s president thanks Trump for ‘precious’ new cologne gift

Syrian leader Ahmed al-Sharaa has thanked US President Donald Trump for a gift of Trump cologne, a callback to their historic meeting in November when the American leader lavished his fragrance on the Syrian jihadist-turned-statesman. – *Story on p. 11*

Xi congratulates Timor-Leste on 24th anniversary of restoration of independence

President Xi Jinping yesterday extended congratulations on the 24th anniversary of the restoration of the independence of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste. – *Story on p. 12*

PJ join forces with 9 anti-fraud centres to combat cross-border scams

Armando Neves

Macau's Judiciary Police (PJ) announced yesterday in a statement that they joined forces with nine anti-fraud centres to combat cross-border scams, tackling a total of 138,000 cases involving losses exceeding 6 billion patacas.

Representatives from the anti-fraud centres of multiple member countries and regions within the "FRONTIER+" cross-border anti-fraud cooperation platform held a press conference about the results of "FRONTIER+ III" joint enforcement operation in the Maldives yesterday.

The joint operation ran from March 10 to May 7, drawing participation from anti-fraud units across 10 countries and regions. These comprise Brunei, Canada, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Maldives, Singapore, South Korea and Thailand as well as China's Hong Kong and Macau special administrative regions.

According to the statement, the joint operation targeted highly prevalent types of fraud, such as online shopping scams, task scams*, fraudulent online investments, and

the impersonation of government officials or customer service representatives for fraudulent purposes

Law enforcement agencies across the participating countries and regions deployed more than 3,200 police personnel in the joint operation. Out of the 138,000 cases initiated, a total of 7,553 individuals were investigated and 3,018 were arrested, with suspects aged between 13 and 85.

A total of 102,000 fraud-linked bank accounts were frozen and over 1.28 billion patacas in illicit funds were seized by the authorities.

Speaking at the press conference, Cheong Un Hong, head of the PJ's Anti-Fraud Coordination Centre, reported that Macau authorities investigated 81 telecom and online fraud cases during the operation, involving victims' losses of 26.28 million patacas.

A total of 10 individuals were arrested in Macau where 11 bank accounts were frozen and 500,000 patacas in fraudulent funds were seized, Cheong said, pointing out that cross-border syndicates are increasingly using methods such

as cryptocurrency transactions, overseas mobile payments, and hiring mules (couriers) to collect and deliver precious metals to launder illicit proceeds. He underscored the vital need for strengthened joint prevention and control efforts among regional police forces.

The Judiciary Police highlighted in the statement that telecom and online fraud in Macau have decreased for two consecutive years, with the first quarter of this year seeing a drop of 30.8 per cent compared to the same period last year. The Judiciary Police stressed that they will continue to deepen cooperation with the 13 member countries and regions to combat cross-border fraud and money laundering. ■

**A task scam (often called an optimisation scam or job scam) is a widespread online fraud where victims are recruited for seemingly simple, remote jobs, only to be tricked into sending their own money to the scammers. It is essentially a modern, digital twist on the classic advance-fee fraud, highly optimised to look like a legitimate freelance gig. – Gemini*



Macau Judiciary Police Anti-Fraud Coordination Centre head Cheong Un Hong (second from right) speaks during yesterday's "FRONTIER+ III" press conference held in the Maldives. – Photo: PJ

Police nab woman for cheating 2 illegal currency exchange dealers

Armando Neves

The Judiciary Police (PJ) arrested a woman from the Chinese mainland for cheating two illegal currency exchange dealers, PJ spokesman Cheong Kim Fong said during a special press conference yesterday.

Cheong identified the suspect as a jobless female in her fifties,

surnamed Lyu. Cheong also said that the two male victims are also from the Chinese mainland, adding that as the duo are suspected of engaging in illegal currency exchange activities in local casinos, the Judiciary Police have opened a separate case to investigate the matter.

According to Cheong, on Tuesday, Lyu entered a casino in

Cotai with 15 counterfeit chips. While in a smoking lounge, Cheong said that Lyu was approached by the duo, adding that they agreed to buy chips worth HK\$150,000 (154,500 patacas) from her for 113,100 yuan. Lyu presented two QR codes for them to transfer the money, Cheong said.

After the transfers were completed, she handed 15 bogus HK\$10,000 chips to them, according to Cheong.

The duo immediately noticed something unusual about the chips and suspected they were counterfeit, Cheong said, adding that they asked Lyu to accompany them to the casino cage to have the chips verified.

According to Cheong, as casino cage staff member confirmed that the chips were badly made, lacked security labels on both the front and back, and could not pass the chip recognition device. The duo then promptly reported the matter to the Judiciary Police.

Upon arrival, PJ officers intercepted Lyu and the two victims, Cheong said, adding that they seized the 15 counterfeit chips and a smartphone.

The investigation revealed that Lyu had colluded with at least one other suspect, who remained at large at the time of the press conference, to smuggle fake chips from the Chinese mainland to Macau so that she could defraud gamblers.

Lyu was transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) yesterday, facing a fraud charge. ■



Judiciary Police (PJ) officers escort the hooded bogus chip suspect to a PJ van outside the PJ headquarters in Zape yesterday. – Photo: Armando Neves

Service point for Municipal Kennel to start operating June 1

Khalel Vallo

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) announced in a statement yesterday that a temporary service point for the Macau Municipal Kennel will begin operations on June 1, as the current kennel facility will undergo maintenance and renovation works expected to last until early next year.

According to the statement, the Macau Municipal Kennel, located at the junction of Avenida do Almirante Lacerda and Avenida do Coronel Mesquita, will temporarily close from June 1 due to ageing facilities and the need for improvements to its internal layout and public reception areas.

During the revamp, the bureau will operate a temporary service point at the former Ox Warehouse adjacent to the kennel site to ensure the continuation of essential public services, the statement said, adding that appointments for veterinary consultations, surgeries, and pet cremation services will be suspended during the works period.

However, previously scheduled bookings and a number

of core services will remain available, including follow-up veterinary consultations, post-operative care, dog licensing, vaccinations, quarantine services, animal health certificates, pet adoption, and animal cremation, the statement noted.

The bureau said the renovation project aims to optimise internal circulation, improve space utilisation, expand public reception areas, and refurbish the building's exterior walls in order to enhance the overall service experience for residents, the statement added.

Meanwhile, locals requiring services during the renovation period will need to access the temporary service point through the side entrance of the former Ox Warehouse, the statement said, adding that the temporary facility will include a waiting area and two consultation rooms.

According to the statement, operating hours will be from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 2:30 p.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday, while remaining closed at weekends and public holidays. ■



This undated handout photo provided by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) yesterday shows the Macau Municipal Kennel at the junction of Avenida do Almirante Lacerda and Avenida do Coronel Mesquita.

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'Sands China Ltd. Macau Open Badminton 2026' to return next month with AI

Khalel Vallo

The Sands China Ltd. Macau Open Badminton 2026 will return to the Macao East Asian Games Dome in Cotai from June 16 to 21, bringing together top badminton players from 29 countries and regions while striving to expand its community and technology-focused initiatives in line with Macau's push to strengthen its position as a "City of Sports", according to a press conference by the integrated resort operator held at The Londoner Macao in Cotai yesterday.

Organised by the Badminton Federation of Macau and supported by Sands China for the third consecutive year, the tournament is part of the HSBC BWF World Tour Super 300 series and will feature men's singles, women's singles, men's doubles, women's doubles, and mixed doubles competitions.

HSBC BWF stands for Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Badminton World Federation.

This year's event offers a total prize pool of US\$370,000 (2.98 million patacas), the highest among Super 300 tournaments this year, according to a statement by Sands China yesterday.

Among the headline players are China's world No. 2 mixed doubles pair Jiang Zhenbang and Wei Yaxin, Malaysia's Olympic bronze medallist Lee Zii Jia, Hong Kong player Angus Ng Ka-long, and South Korea's Kim Ga-Eun.

Local players competing in the tournament



Sands China Executive Vice Chairman Wilfred Wong Ying-wai (left) and Badminton Federation of Macau President Kong Tat Choi address yesterday's "Sands China Ltd. Macau Open Badminton 2026" press conference at The Londoner Macao in Cotai.



– Photos: Khalel Vallo

include Pui Pang Fong, Ng Weng Chi, Leong Kok Chong, Pui Chi Chon, and Pui Chi Wa.

Addressing yesterday's press conference, Sands China Executive Vice Chairman Wilfred Wong Ying-wai said the tournament demonstrates the impact of international sporting events in supporting Macau's "Tourism + Sports" development direction. "We strive to continually strengthen Macau's

drawcard as a 'City of Sports', while integrating the city's diverse and distinctive appeal to advance Macau's development into a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure", Wong said.

This year's edition will also introduce expanded outreach programmes, such as badminton exchanges between international athletes and local students, as well as interactive AI and sports technology experiences.

Meanwhile, Kong Tat Choi, president of the Badminton Federation of Macau, said his group hopes the tournament will attract more international athletes to Macau and further advance the city's development as a "City of Sports", adding that this year's edition would focus on improving the spectator experience and offering expanded ticket discounts to encourage broader public participation in the event.

Speaking to the media after the press conference, Pui Pang Fong said he hopes to perform well in both the men's singles and doubles competitions. "I've been adjusting my condition recently and improving my physical fitness. I hope I can perform well in the competition and break through", he said. On the role of AI in sports, Pui said the technology could help athletes process large amounts of performance data more efficiently. "AI can help us develop in the future because it can analyse a lot of data. If we analyse the data ourselves, it will take a lot of time", Pui noted.

Moreover, Ng Weng Chi said she aims to continue improving after recently returning from competitions in mainland China. "I want to keep training in this condition and improve my skills through competition", she said, expressing hope to achieve a breakthrough result alongside her doubles partner.

Tickets for the tournament will go on sale today at 11 a.m. through Macau Ticketing, Damai, Ctrip.com and Trip.com platforms. Early discounts will be available until June 15 for Macau residents and non-residents, while students can receive discounted admission with valid identification. ■

'HAHALULU' exhibition extends to One Central



This photo recently provided by MGM shows the "HAHALULU Wishing Gourd Tree" displayed in the atrium of One Central Macau.

Rui Pastorin

The ongoing exhibition at MGM MACAU featuring the Eastern trendy art IP "HAHALULU" has been expanded to One Central Macau.

On until August 31, the integrated resort operator said in a recent statement that MGM, One Central Macau, and the Macao International Brand Enterprise Commercial Association have jointly extended the exhibition to the shopping mall, being titled "MGM x HAHALULU x One Central Macau Trend Art Exhibition".

The featured IP was created by high-end jewellery brand Qeelin's founder Dennis Chan (陳瑞麟), who the statement said has "decades of deep engagement with traditional Eastern culture", while his IP draws inspiration from the gourd, a symbol of good fortune in Chinese tradition.

The main exhibition, which kicked off in April, is taking place at MGM MACAU's

Grande Praça, this time featuring new exhibits comprising four "Crystal LULU figures", according to the statement. These are namely: "Golden Blessing Light", "Radiant Light", "Sculpted Shadow Light", and "Aegean Light", the statement said, adding that the series was created using the snow-setting technique to assemble thousands of crystals one-by-one.

Other additions at the MGM exhibition are new sculptures and paintings, as well as original oil on canvas works.

Meanwhile, among the exhibits being showcased at the atrium of One Central Macau are the "HAHALULU Wishing Gourd Tree" that features four-coloured gourds symbolising health, wealth, love and career, and the translucent gourd-shaped mirror installation titled "HAHALULU Mirror".

Themed products, desserts and beverages are also presented. ■



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Macau artist uses 30 artworks to show, emphasise self-love

Rui Pastorin

Thirty different ways of showing self-love are being presented across artworks by young local artist Ceci Chio (趙韻詩) for her aptly named solo exhibition “Self-Love Project 30: Thirty Ways to Love Yourself”, which is now in its final four days at the Pavilion of Exhibitions and Artistic Shows for Young People in Praça do Tap Siac (塔石廣場).

An artist who tackles illustration and graphic design, Chio’s works on display at the free-admission exhibition, which is on until Sunday, comprise digital drawings.

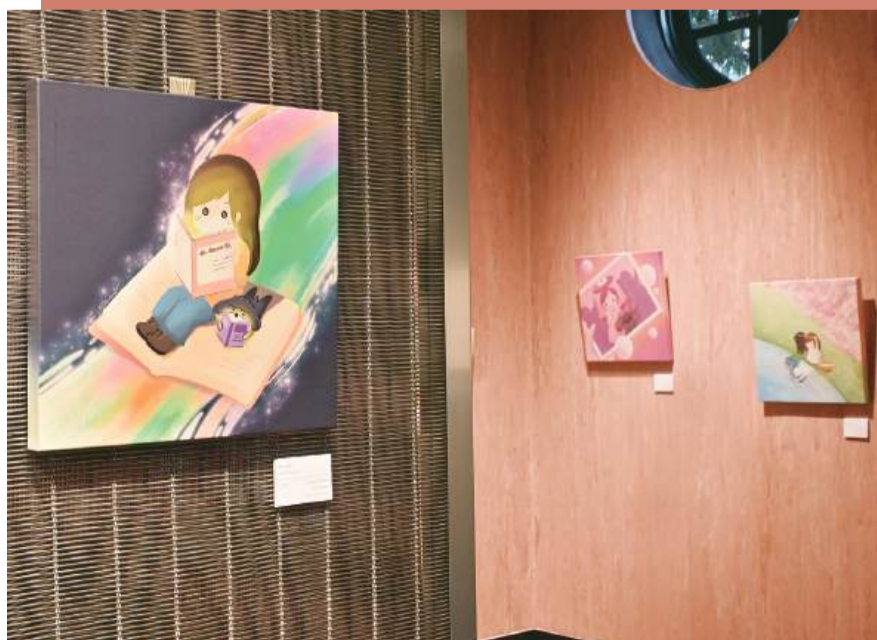
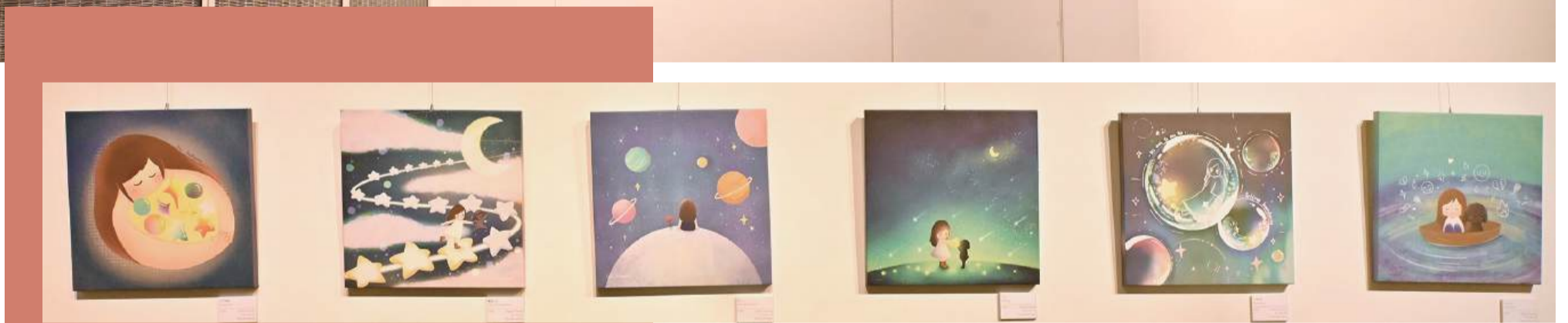
With titles like “Love Exercise”, “Forgiveness”, “Unplugged”, “Celebrate Every Moment” and “Eat Healthy”, each of the artworks on display aims to reaffirm the idea, carrying a simple, yet important message that she conveys through vibrant colours that includes endearing characters, among which is a small black dog, which enter scenes that the artist uses to portray ways of showing self-love.

Moreover, exhibitiongoers venturing towards the back of the venue will also be able to watch a video on the same subject in addition to the digital drawings.

According to a recent statement from the organisers, the works on display were made through the idea that people “gradually lose themselves, forget to listen to their inner voices, and suppress their true selves under the weight of work, studies, and the judgment of others”. And it is through these artworks that the artist hopes that exhibitiongoers will somehow be able to slow down, temporarily ease their worries, and find ways to show love for oneself.

“Self-love is not selfishness. It is a gentle yet courageous choice”, emphasised the artist in a statement displayed at the gallery. The statement further highlighted that true self-love means releasing oneself from external expectations and self-judgments, instead embracing the imperfect present moment, therefore allowing oneself to experience growth and healing.

With only four days left, members of the public may visit the exhibition from noon through 8 p.m. until the exhibition ends on Sunday night.



Photos: Rui Pastorin

Macau, Kazakhstan ink 3 criminal judicial cooperation accords

Tony Wong

Macau and Kazakhstan yesterday signed three agreements on criminal judicial cooperation, the local government announced in a statement last night.

The three agreements, signed between the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of Kazakhstan, comprise Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters, Extradition of Fugitive Offenders, and Transfer of Sentenced Persons.

On behalf of the MSAR government and the government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the three agreements were signed by Macau Secretary for Administration and Justice Wong Sio Chak and Kazakhstan Prosecutor General Berik Assyllov at Macau Government Headquarters.

Last night's statement, which was released by the Secretariat for Administration and Justice, noted that Kazakhstan is where China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was first proposed. The signing of three agreements between the MSAR and Kazakhstan at the same time carries extraordinary significance; it not only marks that the cooperative relationship between the two places has reached a new height, but also represents a fruitful result achieved by the MSAR in the field of external mutual judicial assistance, the statement said.

The statement described the three agreements as core instruments in the field of criminal judicial cooperation. The signing of the three agreements allows the MSAR and Kazakhstan to establish a clear and highly efficient

cooperation mechanism, which contributes to mutually enhancing the efficiency of cooperation in areas such as the recovery of stolen assets, the capture of fugitives, and the investigation and collection of evidence, making efforts to ensure that criminals are held criminally responsible, strengthening the fight against cross-border criminal activities, and providing better legal safeguards for economic and commercial cooperation and the movement of people between the two sides, the statement said.

Furthermore, the statement said, this also helps ensure that sentenced persons return to their place of origin to serve their sentences, which not only facilitates their rehabilitation and reintegration into society but also demonstrates a spirit of humanitarianism and the rule of law. ■



Macau Secretary for Administration and Justice Wong Sio Chak (right) and Kazakhstan Prosecutor General Berik Assyllov shake hands after signing the three agreements at Macau Government Headquarters yesterday. — Photo: Wong's office

2024 personal income tax rebate to start tomorrow



This file photo taken late last year shows a woman walking past the headquarters of the Financial Services Bureau (DSF) on Avenida da Praia Grande in Nam Van. — Photo: Tony Wong

Tony Wong

A rebate of 60 percent of the personal income tax paid for 2024 will be passed to the respective taxpayers starting from tomorrow, the Financial Services Bureau (DSF) announced in a statement yesterday.

Macau's fiscal and calendar years are identical.

The statement noted that according to the government's 2026 budget, which was passed by the legislature in its second and final reading in December last year, local personal income taxpayers are entitled to a rebate of 60 percent of their tax paid for the 2024 fiscal year, with the rebate's payments to be issued to them in the 2026 fiscal year, with a maximum rebate of 14,000 patacas for each taxpayer.

The total amount of the government's rebate will amount to about 1.04 billion patacas.

The statement noted that the

rebates will be paid via bank transfer or crossed cheque sent by post, where taxpayers registered for bank transfer will receive their tax rebates tomorrow with the money to be deposited into their bank accounts, while taxpayers not registered for bank transfer will be paid with a crossed cheque to be posted to their designated address.

The statement said that the bureau expects the last cheques to be delivered to the respective taxpayers early next month.

For public servants not registered for bank transfer to receive their tax rebates, according to the statement, their tax rebates will be deposited together with their monthly salary into their salary accounts next month.

The statement also said that the first batch of the rebate's payments will cover around 169,300 personal income taxpayers. ■

PJ foil 1 million yuan 'fake police' scam

Armindo Neves

The Judiciary Police (PJ) have prevented a young man from the Chinese mainland from losing one million yuan (1.18 million patacas) to a "fake police" phone scam, a spokesman revealed during a regular press conference yesterday.

According to PJ spokesman Cheong Kim Fong, the Judiciary Police received a notification last Friday from the Chinese mainland's public security authorities warning them that a mainland citizen in Macau was being targeted by telecom fraudsters.

PJ officers immediately took action to locate the victim and question him about the case at the PJ headquarters, Cheong said, adding that it was only then that the victim realised he had fallen prey to an impersonation scam involving fraudsters posing as mainland police officers and prosecutors.

The victim told officers he had received a call from someone

claiming to be a public security officer, who claimed that his mobile phone number had been used to send a large volume of fraudulent text messages. The caller demanded that the victim cooperate with a criminal investigation, later requesting money under various pretexts.

Cheong noted that the victim had intended to transfer one million yuan last Friday, but the transaction was successfully blocked by the police intervention.

2 more 'fake police' scam victims

Meanwhile, Cheong also announced that two local residents lost a combined total of 579,960 patacas in similar "fake police" scams early this week.

Both victims reported receiving calls from individuals claiming to be public security officers. They were instructed to cooperate with an investigation and enable a screen-

sharing function on their mobile phones to undergo a "financial review".

After following these instructions, both victims unwittingly provided their complete banking details, online banking passwords, and verification codes. They subsequently discovered that 550,000 patacas and 29,960 patacas, respectively, had been drained from their accounts, prompting them to report the cases separately to the Judiciary Police. ■



Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Cheong Kim Fong looks on during yesterday's regular press conference at the PJ headquarters in Zape. — Photo: Armindo Neves

Commerce ministry elaborates on outcomes of China-US economic, trade consultations

BEIJING — Ministry of Commerce yesterday elaborated on the preliminary outcomes of the recently held China-US economic and trade consultations, covering issues including tariffs, agricultural trade, rare earth export controls, and aircraft trade.

The two sides have agreed in principle to discuss, under the trade council, a reciprocal tariff reduction framework arrangement on products of equivalent scale — worth US\$30 billion or more on each side, a ministry official said, referring to the bilateral consultations held in the Republic of Korea from May 12 to 13.

The products of respective concern as agreed by both sides are expected to enjoy most-favored-nation tariff rates or even lower rates, according to the official.

"Once implemented, the arrangement will not only help stabilize and expand bilateral trade between China and the United States, but also serve as a useful reference for global open cooperation," the official

said, adding that the economic and trade teams of the two sides will maintain close communication, work out specific arrangements, and push for early implementation.

On export controls on rare earths and other critical minerals, the official noted that China implements such measures in accordance with laws and regulations, and reviews license applications that are compliant and for civilian use.

"China is willing to work with the United States to jointly create favorable conditions for promoting mutually beneficial cooperation between the two countries' enterprises and ensuring the security and stability of global industrial and supply chains," the official said.

As another outcome of the consultations, China will purchase 200 Boeing aircraft in line with its air transport development needs and commercial principles. Meanwhile, the United States will guarantee China a sufficient supply of engines and spare parts, according to the official.

Regarding bilateral agricultural trade, the official said that imports of US agricultural products can help bridge structural supply-demand gaps in China's domestic market and diversify food supplies for consumers, while China's vast consumer market provides steady income for US farmers.

The official added that China's specialty agricultural products, such as dairy, aquatic products, vegetables and fruits, also have strong potential demand in the US market.

Following equal consultations, the two sides achieved positive outcomes in the agricultural sector and reached multiple consensus on the issue of two-way market access for agricultural products, the official said.

Addressing the registration of US beef enterprises, the official noted that China attaches great importance to bilateral agricultural trade cooperation and welcomes high-quality US agricultural products entering the Chinese market. — Xinhua

2024 Personal Income Tax Refund Scheme

May 22

Refund of 2024 Personal Income Tax from May 22

Refund of 60% of the tax payable and already paid

Maximum limit is MOP 14,000

May 22

Bank Transfer

Early June

Mailing of crossed cheques completed

★ For staff of public departments or entities not registered for "收付通" to receive payments from the Financial Services Bureau via transfer, the tax refund will be deposited into their salary accounts along with their salary in June.

2833 6886

The poster released by the Financial Services Bureau (DSF) yesterday shows key information on the government's personal income tax rebates. The AI-translated English text was arranged by the Post.

Xi, Putin attend opening ceremony of China-Russia Years of Education



President Xi Jinping (left) and Russian President Vladimir Putin (right) attend the opening ceremony of the China-Russia Years of Education at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. — Xinhua

BEIJING — President Xi Jinping and visiting Russian President Vladimir Putin attended the opening ceremony of the China-Russia Years of Education at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday.

Addressing the event, Xi said that China-Russia educational cooperation has continued to deepen and yielded notable results over the years, enriching the connotation of the China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era.

Taking the China-Russia Years of Education as an opportunity, the two

sides should further build consensus on cooperation, expand areas of cooperation and elevate the level of cooperation, Xi said.

Xi called for deepening cooperation in talent cultivation and jointly tackling challenges in frontier science to facilitate the two countries' innovation drive and development.

He also stressed the need to practice the notion of mutual learning between civilizations, promote the exchange of experience in educational governance, and carry on traditional friendship to further unleash the potential of educational cooperation

to promote mutual understanding and bonds among the two peoples.

Putin, who is on a state visit to China, said the launch of the Russia-China Years of Education is of milestone significance.

Through strengthening educational cooperation, Russia stands ready to work with China to enhance mutual understanding between the younger generations of the two countries, ensure the cause of Russia-China friendship is passed on from generation to generation, and promote greater development of bilateral relations, he said. — Xinhua

Xi, Putin hail 'new stage' of ties

Continued from p.1

Xi and Putin also signed and issued a joint statement on further strengthening comprehensive strategic coordination and deepening good-neighborliness and friendly cooperation.

On the same day, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun announced that China has decided to extend the visa-free policy for Russian citizens to December 31, 2027, in a move to continuously facilitate personnel exchanges between the two countries.

More Just, Equitable Global Governance System

As permanent members of the UN Security Council and major countries of the world, China and Russia should adopt a strategic and long-term perspective and work to make the global governance system more just and equitable, Xi told Putin.

Xi called on both sides to deepen multilateral coordination, strengthen cooperation on multilateral platforms, firmly uphold the post-war international order and the authority of international law, unite the Global South, and steer reform of the global governance system in the right direction.

The two leaders also exchanged views on major international and regional issues.

On the situation in the Gulf region in the Middle East, Xi said all hostilities must cease immediately, adding that an early end to the conflict would help ease disruptions to energy supplies, industrial and supply chains, and the international trade order.

In a volatile international landscape, Russia-China cooperation serves as an important stabilizing factor, Putin said.

He added that Russia is ready to continue strengthening multilateral coordination with China, support China in hosting the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting, jointly enhance the status and influence of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and strengthen unity and coordination within the BRICS mechanism.

Putin also vowed to work with China to safeguard the authority of the UN, champion the diversity of civilizations, and promote a more just and equitable international order.

During Putin's visit, China and Russia also issued a joint statement on advocating a multipolar world and new type of international relations.

Amid current global turbulence and rising bloc confrontation, the two countries serve as a crucial force for stability, said Li Ziguang, director of the Department for European-Central Asian Studies under the China Institute of International Studies.

The stability and predictability of the bilateral relationship represent a significant contribution to global peace and development, Li said. — Xinhua

Xi, Putin visit photo exhibition celebrating China-Russia friendship

BEIJING — President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday visited a photo exhibition that celebrates the everlasting friendship between the two countries.

The exhibition, jointly hosted by China's Xinhua News Agency and

Russia's TASS News Agency, was held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing.

Touring the exhibition, Xi and Putin recalled the moments of friendly exchanges and cooperation between the two countries in recent years.

The great cause of China-

Russia friendship conforms to the trend of history and the tide of the times. This unbreakable friendship will surely continue to grow in a steady and sustained manner and open a new chapter of even greater achievements, according to the two presidents. — Xinhua



President Xi Jinping (center, front) and Russian President Vladimir Putin (second from left) visit a photo exhibition that celebrates the everlasting friendship between the two countries at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. — Xinhua

Li, Putin vow to increase cooperation, exchanges

BEIJING — Premier Li Qiang met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Beijing yesterday.

Li said that amid an increasingly turbulent international landscape, the China-Russia relationship has remained stable and predictable.

China stands ready to work with Russia to follow the strategic guidance of the two heads of state and elevate bilateral cooperation to new heights, he said.

The premier said China is ready to join hands with the Russian side to expand trade, implement the upgraded bilateral investment pact, and deepen cooperation in fields such as energy, agriculture, connectivity, and green and low-carbon development.

China is also willing to work alongside the Russian side to strengthen the alignment between Belt and Road (B&R) cooperation and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), while ensuring the safe, stable and high-quality development of the China-Europe Railway Express, Li noted.

The premier called on the two sides to deepen exchanges and cooperation in areas such as youth, culture, tourism and sports. China is ready to strengthen coordination with Russia on multilateral platforms, he added.

Putin said Russia is willing to maintain close high-level exchanges with China, give full play to the prime ministers' regular meeting mechanism of the two countries, and advance cooperation in fields such as trade, energy, agriculture, transport and logistics, industry, the digital economy, artificial intelligence, and sci-tech innovation.

Russia will take the Russia-China Years of Education initiative as an opportunity to expand people-to-people exchanges, said Putin. — Xinhua

Xi, Putin agree to further extend China-Russia Treaty

BEIJING – President Xi Jinping held talks with visiting Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday with the two sides agreeing to further extend the China-Russia Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation.

Xi noted that this year marks the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the China-Russia strategic partnership of coordination and the 25th anniversary of the signing of the China-Russia Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation.

China-Russia relations have come this far step by step precisely because the two countries have kept deepening political mutual trust and strategic coordination with unyielding tenacity, expanded all-round cooperation with a drive to always scale new heights, and defended international justice and fairness and advanced the building of a community with a shared future for humanity with unflappable resolve, he said.

As permanent members of the UN Security Council and important major countries in the world, China and Russia should take a strategic and long-term perspective, drive the development and revitalization of our respective countries through comprehensive strategic coordination of even higher quality, and work to make the global governance system more just and equitable, Xi said.

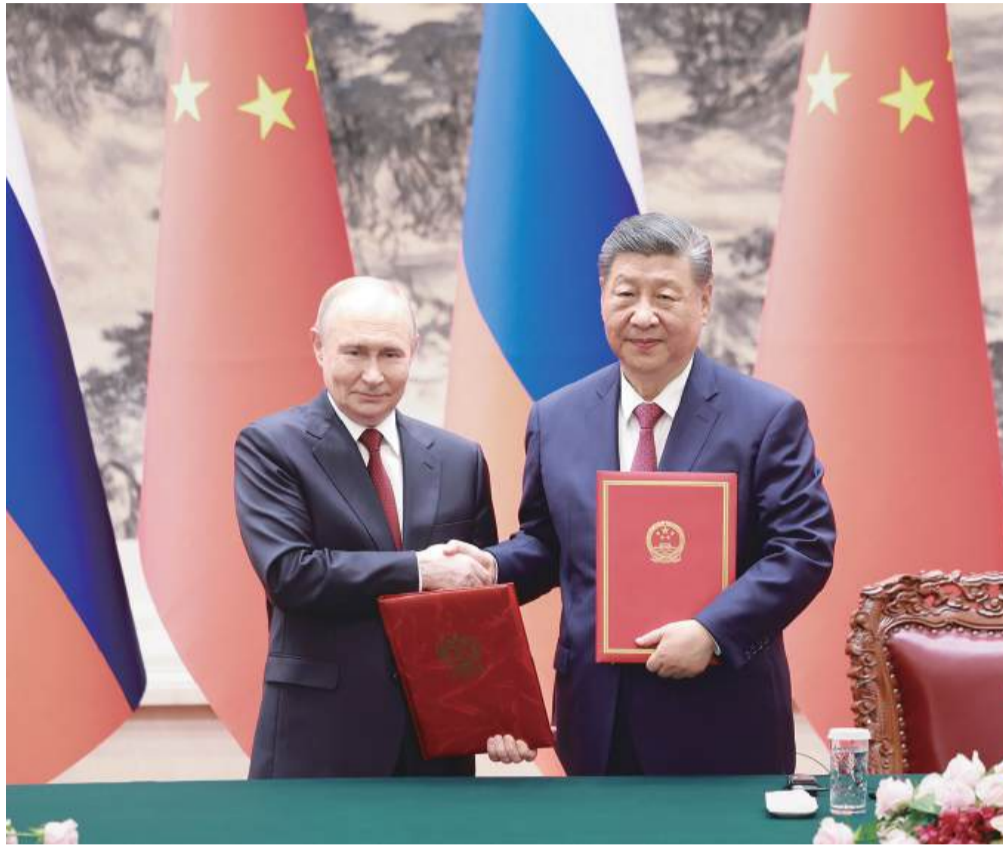
China and Russia have developed the comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era on the basis of equality, mutual respect, good faith, and win-win cooperation, he said.

Political mutual trust has further deepened, cooperation in various areas such as trade and economy, investment, energy, science and technology, people-to-people and sub-national exchanges has continued to advance, and the bonds between the two peoples have grown stronger, Xi added.

The China-Russia relationship has entered a new stage of greater achievements and faster development, he stressed.

Unswervingly promoting the long-term, sound, steady and high-quality development of the China-Russia relationship is a strategic choice by the two sides based on the fundamental interests of the two countries and the global trends, said Xi.

Xi called on China and Russia to fully implement the important common understandings reached by him and Putin, seize the historic opportunities, and further



President Xi Jinping (right) and Russian President Vladimir Putin sign a joint statement on further enhancing the comprehensive strategic coordination and deepening good-neighborliness and friendly cooperation between the two countries, after their talks at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. – Xinhua

promote the mutual trust, cooperation and friendship of the two countries.

Xi emphasized that both sides should focus on the goals of national development and revitalization, fully leverage the comprehensive and well-established mechanisms of China-Russia cooperation, and strengthen overall planning for cooperation in all respects.

The two countries should also promote the upgrading of practical cooperation in trade and investment, energy and resources, transportation, science, technology and innovation, and actively explore cooperation in frontier areas, so as to create new engines of growth with new quality productive forces, he added.

Efforts should be made to continue the long-standing friendship between the two sides, strengthen exchanges and cooperation in education, culture, film, tourism and sports, and consolidate the social and public support for bilateral friendship, Xi noted.

Moreover, both sides should deepen multilateral collaboration, further enhance coordination and cooperation under the frameworks such as the UN, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), BRICS,

and APEC, Xi said.

He also underscored joint efforts to firmly safeguard the post-war international order and the authority of international law, unite the Global South, and guide the reform of the global governance system in the right direction.

Putin said Russia-China relations, under joint efforts from both sides, have reached an unprecedented level, featuring close high-level exchanges and solid political mutual trust.

The two sides have seen a steady increase in bilateral trade, mutually beneficial energy supply and demand, the ever-deepening cooperation in transportation, logistics, science and technology, among others, and sound momentum in people-to-people exchanges, Putin added.

Russia-China relations have withstood tests and grown stronger over time, becoming a paradigm of comprehensive strategic coordination, said Putin.

Stressing that the Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation is ever more relevant under the current situation, Putin said Russia is ready to work

with China to act in line with the spirit of the Treaty, strengthen strategic coordination and practical cooperation, and promote bilateral relations to a higher level.

Noting that Russia-China bilateral cooperation is an important stabilizing factor in the volatile international situation, Putin said Russia will continue to strengthen multilateral coordination with China, support China in hosting the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting successfully, jointly enhance the status and influence of the SCO, strengthen unity and coordination within the BRICS mechanism, uphold the authority of the UN, champion the diversity of civilizations, and promote a more just and equitable international order.

Xi and Putin also exchanged views on the situation in the Middle East and other major international and regional issues.

They heard progress reports from the co-chairs of the deputy prime ministerial level subcommittees under the framework of the China-Russia prime ministers' regular meeting mechanism regarding cooperation in areas such as investment, energy, economy and trade, Northeast China and the Russian Far East, and people-to-people exchanges.

The foreign ministers of the two countries reported on the coordination and cooperation between China and Russia in international and regional affairs.

Following the talks, Xi and Putin signed and issued a joint statement on further enhancing comprehensive strategic coordination and deepening good-neighborliness and friendly cooperation between the two countries.

They also witnessed the signing of 20 cooperation documents in areas including the economy and trade, education, and science and technology.

During Putin's visit, China and Russia issued a joint statement on advocating a multipolar world and new type of international relations. The two sides also reached 20 cooperation agreements in other fields.

Xi and Putin then jointly met the press.

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

Yesterday evening, Xi held a welcoming banquet for Putin in the Golden Hall of the Great Hall of the People.

Putin left Beijing last night, concluding his two-day state visit to China. He had arrived in Beijing on Tuesday night. – Xinhua, MPD

Xi, Putin have tea chat at Great Hall of the People

BEIJING – President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin had a tea chat on last night at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing.

Xi said that over the years, he and Putin have maintained frequent and close exchanges, and jointly created a new model of major-country relations featuring mutual respect, fairness and justice, and win-win cooperation, injecting the much-needed stability into a changing and turbulent world.

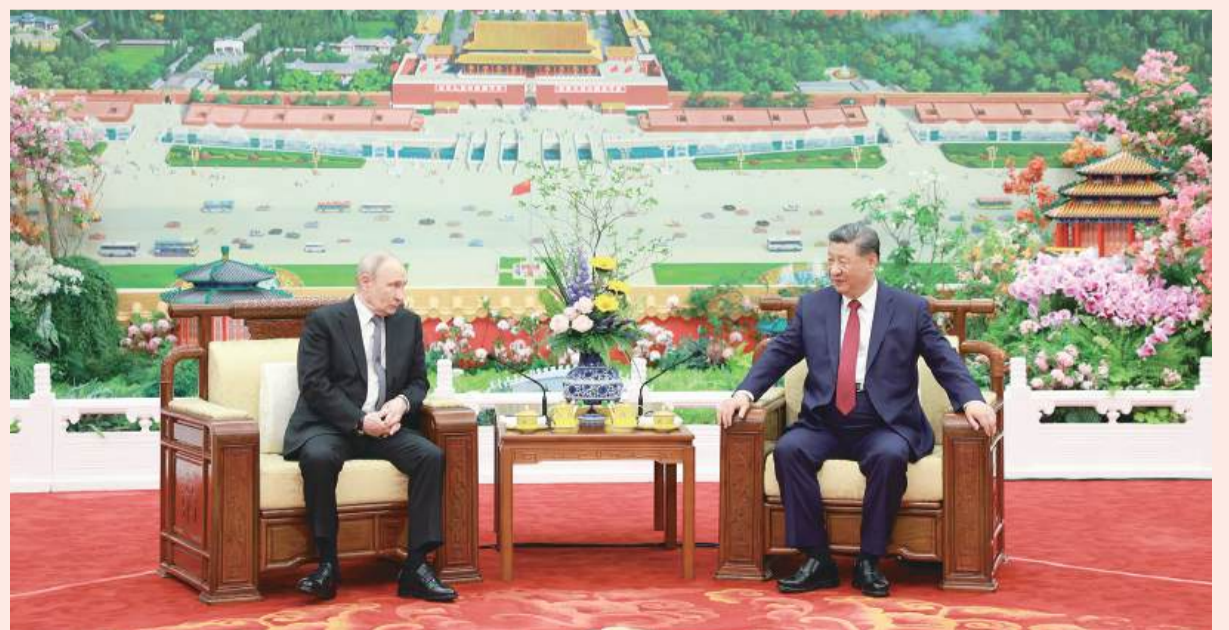
Noting that the two sides have reached new important consensus on promoting China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination, Xi expressed confidence that with unremitting efforts from both sides, China-Russia relations will

surely build on the momentum of high-quality development and scale new heights.

Hailing the visit as pragmatic, efficient and fruitful, Putin said he and Xi have reviewed the development of Russia-China relations, held in-depth exchanges of views on a wide range of issues, and charted the course for future cooperation, which will help ensure robust momentum for the bilateral relationship.

Russia looks forward to maintaining close communication with China, strengthening strategic coordination, and making new contributions to world peace and prosperity through the certainty and stability of Russia-China relations, Putin said.

– Xinhua



President Xi Jinping (right) and Russian President Vladimir Putin have a tea chat at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. – Xinhua

Sky bridges, citizen science protect endangered Malaysia monkeys

AFP's Isabelle Leong and Mongabay's Philip Jacobson

TANJUNGBUNGAH, Malaysia – A graceful black monkey edges across a swaying red rope bridge strung over a busy residential road in Malaysia's Penang, watched by local conservationists who carefully record her movements.

For Malaysia's endangered dusky langurs, recognisable by the "masks" of white fur that ring their eyes, survival increasingly depends on such man-made crossings and the work of "citizen scientists".

A fragmented habitat, conflict with local communities, and poaching have all pushed the species to endangered status.

But the Langur Project Penang (LPP) conservation group hopes that low-tech engineering and high-tech community engagement can help protect the species, also known as the dusky leaf monkey.

Key to their efforts is helping the monkeys navigate fragmented habitat crisscrossed by busy roads where the animals are often killed.

LPP founder Yap Jo Leen realised the need for a solution when she saw dusky langurs repeatedly risking road crossings as she carried out fieldwork in 2016.

"I realised that they don't just stay in the forest. They also cross roads to the coastal area to look for food," she told AFP.

She came up with the idea of building some kind of crossing, and pairing the solution with community engagement.

"At the time, the idea was wild because no one in Malaysia had actually done it before" she said of the crossing plan.

Similar canopy bridges have helped other endangered primates elsewhere, including in Indonesia, where an orangutan was recently seen using such a crossing for the first time.

'Safe haven'

Yap's team experimented with different materials before settling on upcycled fire hoses "twisted to mimic tree branches".

They are suspended over roads from a tree on one side and a



This picture taken on April 9 shows a dusky langur crossing an artificial canopy bridge called 'Numi's Crossing' as part of the Langur Project Penang (LPP) across Lembah Permai Road in the Tanjung Bungal area of George Town on Malaysia's Penang Island.

– AFP

custom-installed pole on the other.

LPP has now installed three, including in April in the coastal suburb and beach destination of Batu Ferringhi.

Yap said the group's research showed they work. At one site, at least eight monkeys died in traffic accidents between 2016 and 2018. No deaths have been recorded since the crossing was installed in 2019.

The crossings also allow groups of monkeys that were once largely confined to an area to expand their range.

"They have more opportunity to venture closer to the hills... and find their way to a safe haven," she said.

That not only benefits the animals, but decreases pressure on local communities that have come into conflict with hungry roving bands of dusky langurs seeking food in urban neighbourhoods.

Addressing that conflict is another part of LPP's efforts.

It recruits members of the local community to serve as "citizen scientists" who track langur movements, collect data and record GPS coordinates using spreadsheets and the Wikiloc trail app.

The volunteers receive a small stipend and training in fieldwork in return for committing to tracking the monkeys for at least three months.

The data helps researchers understand more about the monkeys, including their home range and their feeding habits, and could one day even help guide reforestation efforts.

'We have to coexist'

The current volunteers range from

age 17 to 65 and "call themselves the 'monkey stalkers' or 'monkey whisperers'", Yap said with a laugh.

Former IT manager Teo Hoon Cheng signed up after encountering "magnificent" langurs on hiking trails over a decade ago.

"You don't need background knowledge in zoology or biology. Anyone can be a citizen scientist," he said.

Other locals work with LPP to ease tensions between the community and the monkeys, including retired graphic designer Tan Soo Siah.

"Somebody needs to step up to act as a bridge for this communication," the 64-year-old said.

Residents complain about the noise the monkeys make when crossing their roofs, as well as occasional "break-ins" when windows are left open.

Tan tries to explain why the monkeys are there, and how they can be gently moved along with a little spray of water.

The work has "taught me the meaning of coexistence," he said.

"It's good that we can use my experience to show how we can live in harmony with the primates."

Fellow resident Lim Hock Cheng said the community was gradually learning to accept the animals.

"We've encroached into their habitat... We have to coexist, learn to live with each other," the 66-year-old said.

"The dusky langurs are also part of our society."

– This article is part of a reporting project between Mongabay and Agence France-Presse (AFP).

Philippine Supreme Court says won't stop ICC arrest of drug war enforcer

Pam Castro

MANILA – The Philippine Supreme Court refused yesterday to block the arrest of a fugitive senator wanted by the International Criminal Court over his role in the nation's deadly drug war.

The interim ruling clears the way for the potential arrest of Senator Ronald Dela Rosa, the former national police chief who was the chief enforcer of ex-president Rodrigo Duterte's crackdown.

"The Supreme Court, in a vote of 9-5-1, denied the prayer for a temporary restraining order and/or status quo ante order filed by Senator Ronald "Bato" M. Dela Rosa," a court statement said.

"Do not lose heart," Dela Rosa's lawyer Israelito Torreon said in a statement, adding he will ask the court to reconsider its ruling.

The ICC last week unsealed an arrest warrant against Dela Rosa, accused along with Duterte and other "co-perpetrators" of the crime against humanity of murder.

Government agents tried to arrest Dela Rosa on the same day, but the pro-Duterte senate leadership foiled the attempt and gave him sanctuary at the senate building following a dramatic chase up the stairs.

Dela Rosa later left the senate for an unknown location following a shooting incident between government agents and senate security personnel last Wednesday that sent senators scurrying for cover in their offices.

Duterte was arrested last year and is awaiting trial by the ICC in The Hague on charges stemming from the drug crackdown.

The drug war left tens of thousands of people dead, mostly drug users and low-level traffickers

from urban slums according to human rights monitors.

Philippine police say more than 6,000 drug suspects were killed in legitimate police operations during the Duterte presidency in 2016-2022.

"For now, we can say that the warrant of arrest is valid against Senator Bato Dela Rosa," President Ferdinand Marcos's spokeswoman Claire Castro told reporters.

It was not immediately known if Manila will now try to enforce the arrest.

Castro said Manila would let Justice Secretary Frederick Vida interpret and evaluate the Supreme Court ruling.

The minister had said last week that government agents would pause efforts to serve the ICC warrant to allow the Supreme Court to resolve all the issues raised by Dela Rosa.

Vida could not be reached for comment yesterday.

Dela Rosa, 64, had also asked the court for an interim injunction to prevent government agents from arresting any sitting senator without a valid Philippine court order.

He also asked that the court make both temporary injunctions permanent.

The top court said yesterday's interim ruling only decided on Dela Rosa's prayers for interim relief, and the 15-member tribunal were yet to decide on the other issues raised by the senator.

"We will exhaust every remedy available under law," his lawyer Torreon said.

Dela Rosa served as national police chief from 2016 to 2018 during the early phase of Duterte's anti-drug campaign and was elected to two successive six-year terms in the Senate after retiring from the force. – AFP



This aerial picture shows demonstrators attempting to block the road, leaving only a single lane open for vehicles, during a National Awakening Day rally, demanding evaluating national policies, economic welfare, and legal reform, in front of the House of Representatives (DPR) building in Jakarta yesterday. – AFP

Thai faith healer charged with rape, child abuse

BANGKOK – One of Thailand's best-known faith healers has been arrested on rape and child sexual abuse charges, police said yesterday, as investigators urged other potential victims to come forward.

Buddhist-majority Thailand is a deeply religious country, where many people believe in reincarnation and karma – the idea that one's current life is shaped by actions in a previous life.

Many critically ill people or those facing personal hardships turn to spiritual rituals or faith healers for comfort and hope, with some offering donations for the services.

Police said yesterday they arrested self-professed healer Paisal Sanchai, 67, this month in the northern province of Lamphun and charged him with

rape and sexual abuse of a minor.

Paisal has for decades been a popular faith healer admired by people ranging from the working class to the elite, with many seeking his spiritual guidance and help to heal.

He gained widespread attention after being visited in 2023 by a popular actor suffering from an autoimmune disease. The actor died the following year.

"We have gathered evidence that gives us confidence to prosecute," Central Investigation Bureau officer Pattanasak Bubpasuwan told reporters at a press conference in Bangkok.

Police displayed blurred images they said showed Paisal performing a sex act that was filmed by a victim last year.

Pattanasak said two alleged

victims had filed complaints after visiting Paisal for chronic pain and other health problems.

One of them was under 18, police said.

Paisal allegedly asked one man to remove his trousers before performing oral sex and touching his genitals, and advised a minor to have sex with a dog as part of a purported treatment, according to police.

Under Thai law, the offences can be punished by up to 20 years in prison.

Police urged other possible victims to speak with authorities, saying they believed the case could involve more people.

"No one else has filed a complaint with us yet, but we want more people to come forward," police official Ekasit Pansitha told reporters. – AFP

Help wanted: Australian conservation group seeks new koala rescue dog

SYDNEY – An Australian animal welfare group is seeking a heroic dog with an appetite for adventure for a full-time position as a koala rescuer.

The successful pooch will replace the world-famous Bear, credited with saving over 100 koalas from bushfires during a decade of service.

“Bear set the gold standard for koala detection dogs,” the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) Oceania head of programmes Josey Sharrad said.

“He’s leaving very big boots to fill, but now it’s time to find his successor to follow in his pawprints and keep protecting koalas.”

The ideal candidate will be a

rescue pup with a lot of energy and an “obsessive” personality – attributes that might make it hard to find a home but which make it perfect for saving koalas, IFAW said.

“By only recruiting a rescue dog, it’s a win-win – giving a dog the chance of a new life while helping our iconic koalas,” Innovation for Conservation director and handler Russell Miller said.

Other key attributes are a love of play, confidence and a gentle temperament towards fellow animals is crucial.

They must also be medium sized – “not too small that they struggle in the bush, not too big that the handlers can’t carry them when needed”,

according to the IFAW job ad.

Interviews were being held in eastern Australia’s Sunshine Coast but applications by video are also welcome.

Bear’s skills saved over 100 koalas as the Black Summer bushfires raged across Australia’s eastern seaboard from late 2019 to early 2020, razing millions of hectares, destroying thousands of homes and blanketing cities in noxious smoke.

The tail-wagging detective with a “joyful and goofy” personality retired with an extensive list of accolades – including an Animal of the Year award and Puppy Tales Photos Australian Dog of the Year award. – AFP



This handout photo from the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) taken on November 10, 2023, shows Bear, a koala detection dog who recently retired, during a training session at an unknown location. – AFP



Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni (left) plants a tree with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Villa Doria Pamphili in Rome yesterday, as the two leaders hold bilateral talks focusing on strengthening India-Italy cooperation. – AFP

UN says US\$610 million shortfall in life-saving Rohingya refugee aid

DHAKA – United Nations agencies supporting Rohingya refugees who fled violence in Myanmar to neighbouring Bangladesh warned yesterday of a critical US\$610 million shortfall in lifesaving aid.

More than a million Rohingya refugees, many who fled Myanmar during a brutal military crackdown in 2017, live in vast refugee camps in Bangladesh’s Cox’s Bazar.

The UN calls it “one of the world’s largest and most protracted refugee situations”, and said that this year it faces a crucial test.

“The Rohingya response faces one of its most critical junctures since the initial influx,” the UN-led Rohingya Refugee Response said in a statement.

“Population numbers and humanitarian needs (are) rising dramatically, while available funding declines amid global humanitarian pressures and competing crises,” it added.

Carol Flore-Smrecznik, the UN chief in Bangladesh, told reporters in Dhaka that it was crucial that the “crisis doesn’t become forgotten”.

The UN is seeking more than US\$710 million to support approximately 1.56 million people, including 1.2 million Rohingya

refugees and 307,000 vulnerable Bangladeshis in host communities.

A core US\$610 million is needed as “the bare minimum”, the organisation said, noting the funds would be for the “most critical life-saving and protection interventions”.

“Nine years after fleeing violence and persecution in Myanmar, 1.2 million Rohingya refugees remain almost entirely dependent on humanitarian assistance”, it said, noting that there have been more Rohingya arrivals since then.

More than 140,000 Rohingya arrivals were registered in 2025, it added.

The 2017 Myanmar crackdown, when Rohingya villages were burned and civilians killed, is the subject of a genocide case at the United Nations’ top court in The Hague.

The refugees are officially not allowed to work.

In April, UN figures showed that the number of Rohingya refugees fleeing Bangladesh and Myanmar by boat had increased by 90 percent compared with last year.

Many undertake dangerous sea journeys on overcrowded boats, often operated by trafficking networks. – AFP

India issues heatwave warnings as fear of El Niño looms

NEW DELHI – India’s weather agency warned yesterday of the risk of upcoming “extreme” heat made worse by the potentially powerful El Niño weather pattern, issuing heatwave preparedness guidelines as temperatures soared.

“Heat waves in India are becoming longer, stronger, and more frequent,” the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said yesterday, warning of current “heat wave to severe heat wave conditions” across northwest and central India.

“Take preventive measures by staying hydrated and keeping cool,” it said, issuing guidance posters on social media detailing the health risks.

The United Nations’ weather and climate agency last month warned that El Niño conditions could develop as soon as May to July.

The IMD did not say the current high temperatures were linked to El Niño, a naturally occurring

climate phenomenon that brings worldwide changes in winds, air pressure and rainfall patterns.

But the department highlighted research from previous events, including a 2022 paper on how El Niño patterns in the past had influenced “extreme temperature events across India and intensifies heat wave conditions”.

It detailed past measurements that showed a “higher heat wave frequency during El Niño”, as well as “increased temperature anomalies” across northwest and central India, as well as “longer heat wave duration and wider spatial spread”.

The last El Niño helped make 2023 and 2024 the two hottest years on record.

India routinely experiences intense heatwaves between April and June.

The IMD said the highest maximum temperature recorded on Tuesday was 48.2C in the city

of Banda in Uttar Pradesh state, 450 kilometres southeast of New Delhi. Temperatures in the capital were 44.4C.

The country’s highest officially recorded temperature is 51C, measured at Phalodi in Rajasthan in 2016.

Scientists say climate change is also making such extreme weather events more frequent and severe.

Last month, international air-quality monitoring platform AQI said its daily heat index – made of six measurements including temperature, solar intensity, wind, precipitation and humidity – recorded that every single one of the world’s top 50 hottest cities was in India.

“Across all 50 cities, the average peak temperature on April 27 was 44.7C. The coolest maximum on the entire list – Solapur at 41.9C – would be considered a public health emergency anywhere in Europe,” it said. – AFP

Bangladesh measles deaths near 500 but vaccines offer hope

DHAKA – Bangladesh has rolled out a mass vaccination campaign to combat its deadliest measles outbreak in decades that has killed nearly 500 children in just two months, the United Nations children’s agency said yesterday.

Deaths are still rising, with six children dying in the past 24 hours alone, taking the toll from the preventable disaster to 481, according to health ministry figures.

But a nationwide immunisation drive has now reached 18 million children, UNICEF country chief Rana Flowers told reporters.

“The good news is 18 million children have been reached with measles vaccination,” Flowers said.

Zahid Raihan, spokesman for the health department, said there were signs of improvement in the worst-affected areas where the outbreak hit hardest – even if the full impact of the vaccinations would take time to be felt.

“Vaccinations will become effective four months after receiving the shots,” he said.

The South Asian nation of 170 million people has been battling its worst measles outbreak since March 15, with more than 50,000 confirmed and suspected cases.

The highly contagious disease has affected children younger than nine months as well as older adults.

Measles impacts children the hardest.

Their breathing can become strained, their strength fades and in the most severe cases, the infection reaches the brain, causing swelling that can lead to lasting damage - or death.

Gaps in vaccination coverage during and after the chaos of a 2024 uprising that overthrew the autocratic government left the youngest generation badly exposed.

“Bangladesh has gone through quite a transition over the last couple of years,” Flowers said.

“The failure to order vaccines was not the result of a lack of money; it was the decision around how to procure them that created a delay,” she added.

She stressed the need to strengthen vaccination programmes and increase funding for health facilities, surveillance and data systems in the future.

“We want to move to a place where routine vaccinations are working properly and reaching the children who need to be reached,” Flowers said.

She suggested lessons must be learnt about the dire failures that led to swathes of deaths, including delays in vaccine procurement.

“No outbreak emerges suddenly overnight,” Flowers said, adding that the UN agency had sent five letters and held at least 10 meetings with previous governments warning of the risks.

A new government was elected in February, weeks before the outbreak began.

“There are always circumstances linked to it, particularly in the case of a vaccine-preventable outbreak,” she said.

“So, the after-action review is going to be critical.”

– AFP

Israeli lawmakers advance bill to dissolve parliament

JERUSALEM – Israeli lawmakers voted yesterday to advance a bill submitted by the ruling coalition of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu which would dissolve parliament and pave the way for early elections.

In a preliminary reading, 110 out of 120 lawmakers voted in favour and none against, while the rest did not cast their vote.

The bill will now pass to a committee before three more parliamentary readings.

If the bill is ultimately approved it would automatically trigger elections to be held after 90 days. Polls are currently scheduled to take place by the end of the legislative term on October 27.

Netanyahu is under mounting pressure from ultra-Orthodox parties, while his fractious right-wing coalition appears to be facing possible collapse.

Ultra-Orthodox parties accuse Netanyahu of failing to deliver

on his promise to pass legislation that would permanently exempt young men of their community from compulsory military service if they are studying in yeshivas, or religious seminaries.

“The dissolution of the Knesset, approved in a preliminary reading yesterday, could still be suspended if the exemption [for ultra-Orthodox students] passed beforehand,” said Myriam Shermer, an Israeli political columnist specialising in elections.

“All of this could once again be turned upside down if military operations resumed in Iran, suspending the electoral calendar. But in the meantime, Benjamin Netanyahu’s coalition seems to be seriously faltering,” Shermer told AFP.

Sensing an opportunity amid the turmoil, several opposition parties announced earlier this month that they intended to introduce their own bills to dissolve the Knesset.

Coalition chairman Ofir Katz said yesterday: “This coalition has

completed its days.”

“This is the only opposition that caused the coalition to grow. In this term we passed nine budgets and 520 laws,” he added.

The bill does not set a date for elections, which would be fixed during the committee stage.

‘Election campaign has begun’

Netanyahu “doesn’t want elections to be close to October 7”, said Gideon Rahat, political science professor at Hebrew University, referring to the date when Hamas militants attacked Israel in 2023.

“The agenda would be on his huge failure there, so he prefers to have it before,” Rahat told AFP.

“Also in Israel you don’t have snap elections, you need about 90-100 days to get ready... so I would say that it was quite predictable that he would have the elections around September.”

Opposition figures have already

been shaping the agenda around the October 7 attacks.

“These are the October 7 elections, the elections in which the Israeli public will send home the government of negligence that brought upon us the greatest disaster in the state’s history,” Yair Golan, head of the left-wing Democrats party, wrote on X.

Netanyahu, a political survivor often described as the phoenix of Israeli politics, is 76 years old and has confirmed he intends to run for office again.

He recently revealed that he had undergone surgery for prostate cancer.

Netanyahu has governed Israel longer than any other prime minister – more than 18 years in total since 1996.

He is seeking another term despite facing a long-running corruption trial.

Many Israelis blame Netanyahu for the security failure that enabled

the unprecedented attack by Hamas.

A poll by Israel’s public broadcaster KAN published this month put his Likud party in first place in voting intentions, with a narrow lead over Beyahad – the joint list of opposition leader Yair Lapid and former prime minister Naftali Bennett.

However, neither bloc appears capable of forming a government, given the fragmented electorate.

“I have two words to say to the outgoing prime minister: It’s over, you can let go,” Bennett said at a Beyahad meeting.

“The election campaign has begun today,” Lapid said at the same event.

“These will be elections to choose between hope and fear. Between those who serve and those who shirk, between integrity and corruption, between those who take responsibility and those who merely shift the blame onto others.” – AFP



Supporters of the Iran-backed Houthi movement brandish weapons and copies of the Quran as they rally in solidarity with Lebanon in Sanaa on Monday. Hezbollah drew Lebanon into the Middle East war on March 2 with rocket fire at Israel in retaliation for the killing of Iran’s supreme leader in US-Israeli strikes days earlier. – AFP

UAE urges Iraq to prevent attacks from its territory ‘immediately’

DUBAI – The United Arab Emirates (UAE) demanded yesterday that Iraq “immediately” prevent further attacks from its territory, following an accusation by the country that a drone targeting a nuclear plant was launched from there.

The foreign ministry in a statement called on “Iraq to prevent all hostile acts originating from its territory urgently and without conditions”, saying there was a “need to address those threats promptly, immediately and responsibly”.

On Sunday, an unclaimed drone attack struck an electrical generator near the Arab world’s only nuclear power plant in Barakah in the emirate of Abu Dhabi, triggering a fire but causing no injuries or radiation leak. Two other drones were intercepted.

Last month, several Gulf

countries – including Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE – and Jordan demanded in a joint statement that Baghdad act immediately to stop attacks from its territory by pro-Iran armed groups.

Along with the Gulf states, Iraq was dragged into the war between the United States, Israel and Iran, with strikes repeatedly targeting both US interests – especially the embassy in Baghdad – and pro-Iran groups in the country.

During the fighting, pro-Iran armed groups claimed to have launched daily attacks on “enemy bases” in Iraq and the wider region, but said they were suspending their actions after a temporary ceasefire was announced in April.

An Iraqi security official told AFP that “Arab countries have not provided precise information, only accusations” and that Iraq demands “evidence and precise information

so that Iraqi authorities can take the appropriate measures”.

Iraqi government spokesperson Bassem al-Awadi told state media on Tuesday that Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi had ordered the formation of military committees to contact Arab states for “accurate information for verification”.

Tehran launched retaliatory strikes across the region after the US and Israel struck Iran on February 28, killing senior leaders and triggering a broader war.

Iran has accused the UAE and other US allies in the Gulf of allowing US forces to carry out attacks from their territory. The UAE has angrily denied Iranian reports that it has actively carried out attacks of its own.

Washington and Tehran agreed a truce on April 8 but peace negotiations have stalled and sporadic attacks have continued. – AFP

Iran’s chief negotiator Ghalibaf says US ‘seeks to start new war’

TEHRAN – Iran’s chief negotiator Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf yesterday said the United States was seeking to restart the war and hoping the Islamic republic would surrender.

“The enemy’s movements, both overt and clandestine, show that despite economic and political pressure, it has not abandoned its military objectives and is seeking to start a new war,” Ghalibaf said in an audio message on his official website.

Ghalibaf’s remarks came as Tehran and Washington escalated threats while swapping proposals to end the war, which broke out on February 28. A ceasefire has been in place since April 8.

Yesterday, Iran’s Revolutionary Guards warned that the war would expand beyond the region if the US and Israel resume attacks after

President Donald Trump said he would strike again unless Tehran agreed a peace deal.

Ghalibaf said the US was still hoping Iran would surrender and respond favourably to Washington’s “excessive demands”, by maintaining economic pressure and a naval blockade in place since April 13.

“We must strengthen our preparations for an effective and forceful response to any potential attacks,” he said, adding that “Iran will never give in to intimidation, under any circumstances”.

Ghalibaf acknowledged the economic pressure on Iranians, while appealing for “national unity”.

“Today it is clearer than ever that we are engaged in a war of wills. Whoever wins this war will write Iran’s history and determine its future,” he said. – AFP

Belgium summons Israel envoy over ‘disturbing’ video of bound flotilla activists

BRUSSELS – Belgium will summon the Israeli ambassador over a “deeply disturbing” video showing detained activists from a Gaza-bound flotilla kneeling with their hands tied, Foreign Minister Maxime Prevot said yesterday, calling for their immediate release.

Israel’s far-right national security minister Itamar Ben Gvir posted the video showing the activists kneeling with their hands tied and foreheads on the ground, sparking international condemnation.

It was published after Israeli forces intercepted the flotilla’s vessels at sea and began detaining hundreds of foreign activists at the southern port of Ashdod.

“Belgian citizens are among

those detained. This situation is unacceptable. It violates the most basic standards of human dignity. All detainees must be treated with dignity and released without delay,” Prevot wrote on X.

The Belgian minister said he asked the Israeli envoy to Belgium be summoned “to express our indignation and ask for explanations”.

He also criticised the “catastrophic” humanitarian situation in Gaza, which “demands the full attention of the international community”.

During the war in Gaza, the Palestinian territory suffered severe shortages of food, medicine and other essential supplies, with Israel at times halting aid deliveries entirely.

– AFP

Google rejects DeepMind UK staff move to unionise

LONDON – Google's AI lab DeepMind said yesterday it had declined to recognise trade unions established by UK employees concerned about the military uses of its technology, but offered to enter into negotiations instead.

The company said it has agreed to enter talks with the unions via a public mediation body, as part of formal next steps that could lead to union representation.

"We've declined the unions' request for voluntary recognition to bargain collectively on pay, hours and holiday," a Google DeepMind spokesperson told AFP.

"But we have offered to meet via ACAS*, which is a standard next step," the spokesperson added.

Workers requested recognition of the Communication Workers Union (CWU) and Unite earlier this month over growing concern about the company's technology being used by the United States and Israeli militaries.

"We welcome Google DeepMind management's offer to engage us in discussions over workplace union recognition," a CWU spokesperson said in a statement.

"In previous months, unprecedented numbers of Google DeepMind employees have expressed concerns over the direction of their work by joining their union," the spokesperson added.

Demands from the unionising UK employees include ending the use of Google AI by Israel and the US military and restoring a scrapped commitment not to make AI weapons or surveillance tools.

It has also requested the company to create an independent ethics oversight body and permit workers to refuse to contribute to projects on moral grounds.

The Pentagon recently announced agreements with Google and six other AI companies to deploy their technology on classified military networks.

Prior to the announcement, more than 600 Google employees urged the company not to sign the deal because of concerns the tools could be leveraged by the military to cause harm.

In 2018, an employee movement successfully pushed Google to abandon Project Maven, a Pentagon programme to integrate AI into drone operations. – AFP

*ACAS stands for the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service. It is an independent, crown-funded body in the UK that provides free and impartial advice to employers and employees on workplace rights, best practices, and policies. Its primary goal is to improve organisational performance and working life through better employment relations. – Gemini

Kenya court calls to end prosecution of minors for sex

NAIROBI – The Kenya High Court ruled yesterday that young people should no longer be criminally prosecuted for having consensual under-age sex and be given better access to sex education.

The decision was praised as a "landmark ruling" by rights campaigners, who have long criticised Kenyan police for arresting young people instead of providing better education and support.

Sex education and the use of contraception remain taboo in many parts of Kenya due to the strong influence of Christian churches.

The case was brought by the Centre for Reproductive Rights, an international NGO based in New York, on behalf of three Kenyan teenagers.

One of them, aged 17, was arrested in February 2025 after police raided the home he shared with his 16-year-old partner and charged him with defilement.

The other petitioners are a couple who became pregnant when they were under-age. The boy was charged with defilement and the case was only dropped three years later.

The court ordered that police and prosecutors should distinguish between consensual and abusive sex even for minors below the legal age of 18.

It said the government should coordinate policies "to ensure adolescent access to sexual and

reproductive health information and services without fear of criminalisation".

"For too long, the Sexual Offences Act has been used as a weapon against the very young people it was meant to protect and the burden has fallen heaviest on those with the least power to fight back," said Martin Onyango, a lawyer working with the Centre for Reproductive Rights, in a statement.

"Today's decision demands that we replace punishment with protection and build a policy and legal framework that supports adolescents rather than destroys their futures," he added.

The NGO argues that fear of prosecution means young Kenyans "avoid health facilities, leading to higher rates of unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections and unsafe abortion".

Kenyan law prescribes 15 years in prison for sex with a child between 16 and 18 but the country's statistics do not differentiate between offenders, making it hard to know how many minors have been imprisoned for consensual sex.

Kenya saw an estimated 792,000 abortions in the year to May 2024 – one of the highest rates in the world – according to a recent study by the Ministry of Health, African Population and Health Research Centre and the Guttmacher Institute. – AFP

Syria's president thanks Trump for 'precious' new cologne gift

DAMASCUS – Syrian leader Ahmed al-Sharaa has thanked US President Donald Trump for a gift of Trump cologne, a callback to their historic meeting in November when the American leader lavished his fragrance on the Syrian jihadist-turned-statesman.

Sharaa was the first Syrian leader to visit the White House since the country's independence in 1946.

"Some meetings leave an impression; ours apparently left a fragrance," Sharaa posted in English on X late on Tuesday, posting an image of two Trump-branded fragrance boxes, one red and the other black.

"Thank you, Mr. President @realDonaldTrump, for your generosity and for topping up this precious gift. May the spirit of that meeting continue to shape a stronger relationship between Syria and the United States."

After the November meeting, video emerged showing Trump gifting Sharaa his cologne, spraying some on him and on Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shaibani.

At the time, Trump also gifted Sharaa a perfume box for his wife, jokingly asking him "how many wives" he had.



This photo illustration taken in Damascus yesterday shows the X account of Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa on a smartphone displaying his tweet on thanking US President Donald Trump for a gift of Trump cologne. – AFP

A note to Sharaa from Trump pictured alongside the new boxes read: "They're all talking about the picture we took when I gave you this great cologne – Just in case you ran out!"

The cologne's website says the fragrance, which sells for US\$249 a bottle, "embodies strength, power, and victory".

Since ousting longtime Syrian ruler and Washington foe Bashar al-Assad in 2024, Sharaa and

his new Islamist authorities in Damascus have rebooted ties with the US.

Trump has ended sanctions and taken other steps to boost Sharaa at the urging of the Syrian leader's allies Saudi Arabia and Turkey, despite Israeli misgivings.

Trump met Sharaa for the first time in May last year in Saudi Arabia during a regional tour, dubbing the Syrian leader "a young, attractive guy". – AFP

Whale of a time: Humpbacks set new distance record

Bénédicte Salvetat Rey

PARIS – Two humpback whales have set new records for the longest-known distances travelled for their species by embarking on a journey of over 14,000 kilometres between Brazil and Australia, scientists said yesterday.

The international team of researchers were able to piece together the separate odysseys from photos of the whales' tails – including some taken by amateur photographers on cruises – captured decades apart.

These journeys through open water are "something that had never been documented before", Cristina Castro, a marine biologist at the Pacific Whale Foundation in Ecuador, told AFP.

"It's not unheard of for an individual to occasionally stray [from a migratory route], but what we documented here goes far beyond that," added the lead author of a new study in *Royal Society Open Science*.

Every humpback has a pattern on the underside of their tail – or fluke – that is unique "like a human fingerprint", Castro said.

The scientists analysed more than 19,000 photos taken between 1984 and 2005 in eastern Australia and Latin America using an image recognition algorithm.

Then they sifted through each potential match to trace the two

whales' journey across the world.

The first humpback was initially photographed in 2007 in Hervey Bay, in the state of Queensland on Australia's east coast.

It was spotted at the same place again in 2013. Its unique fluke next popped up six years later – this time off the coast of the Brazilian megacity São Paulo.

As the crow flies, this is a distance of around 14,200 km. Because the scientists only know the start and end points of the journey, it was impossible to determine the whale's exact route – or how far it actually travelled.

The second whale made the opposite journey.

First it was photographed off the coast of Bahia, Brazil in 2003 with eight other adult humpbacks.

Nearly a quarter of a century later, in 2025, it was spotted in Hervey Bay – a distance of 15,100 km.

The previous humpback travel record was held by a whale that swam more than 13,000 km from Colombia's Pacific coast to Zanzibar off eastern Africa.

'Remarkable singers'

Humpback whales in the Southern Hemisphere live in well-defined pods and usually follow the same migratory routes every year, travelling between feeding areas in cold water and breeding grounds in the tropics.

"Mothers actually teach these routes to their calves when they are young, so the patterns are deeply ingrained," Castro said.

The scientists suggested several theories for why these two humpbacks embarked on such "exceptional" deviations from the normal routes.

Changes in the ocean, including some caused by human-driven climate change, "could be altering migration corridors in ways we don't yet fully understand", Castro said.

"Disturbances or pressures in their original areas might push some individuals to explore further," she said, adding that the availability of food could also play a role.

By taking the long way around, the whales could contribute to the genetic diversity of their species. Humans once hunted humpbacks to the edge of extinction, but their numbers have rebounded in recent decades.

The strange journeys taken by these whales could also help them learn and spread new songs.

"Male humpback whales are remarkable singers" that "produce long, complex songs," Castro explained.

When a male "introduces a new phrase, others copy it, and within a season the whole population has shifted," she added.

"If a male from one breeding area arrives in another and sings, he could seed an entirely new musical influence." – AFP

Xi congratulates Timor-Leste on 24th anniversary of restoration of independence

BEIJING – President Xi Jinping yesterday extended congratulations on the 24th anniversary of the restoration of the independence of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste.

In a message to José Ramos-Horta, Timor-Leste's president, Xi said that over the past 24 years, Timor-Leste has made solid progress in nation-building with significant improvement

in people's livelihoods and that the nation's accession to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations last year has further enhanced its international and regional influence.

China and Timor-Leste, he said, enjoy a long-standing traditional friendship, with fruitful outcomes in mutually beneficial cooperation.

China appreciates President

Ramos-Horta's consistent emphasis on developing bilateral relations and steadfast support for China in the international arena, Xi added.

Xi voiced readiness to work with Ramos-Horta to push for further progress in the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries so as to bring more benefits to the two peoples. – *Xinhua, MPD*



Posters of Cuba's Argentine-born revolutionary leader Ernesto "Che" Guevara (late), late Cuban leader Fidel Castro (centre) and former Cuban president Raúl Castro are seen at the entrance of a repair workshop in Havana yesterday.

– AFP

Can Brazil become a major rare earths supplier?

Juan Sebastian Serrano

BRASÍLIA – Brazil sits atop a potential bonanza of rare earths that has sparked global interest, led by Washington, as demand surges for the increasingly vital minerals.

But any windfall still appears a distant prospect as Latin America's biggest economy currently mines only a marginal amount.

Only China has greater reserves of the critical minerals which are essential to make everything from smartphones to electric vehicles and missiles.

Despite their name, the 17 elements are not actually rare, but rather extremely complex to extract and the requisite capital and technology are in short supply in Brazil.

So can the Latin American giant become a major supplier?

How large are the reserves?

Brazil has more than 20 million tonnes of rare earths, according to estimates by the US Geological Survey (USGS).

It holds the second-largest reserves after China and ranks far ahead of India, the third-placed nation which has an estimated 6.9 million tonnes of the critical minerals.

But Brazil exported only 20 tonnes in 2024, a tiny share of global production, which the USGS estimated at 390,000 tonnes that year.

China accounts for around two-thirds of the total global production.

Why is production so low?

Rare earth elements are found in sands, clays or rocks alongside dozens of other compounds and must be separated through a costly process.

"Between what we extract from the ground and the oxide [of rare earths], which would be 99.9 percent pure, there are at least 400 industrial processes," explained Pablo Cesário, president of the Brazilian Mining Institute (IBRAM), which represents the sector's main companies.

"We can do this at laboratory scale. What we do not have – and almost nobody in the world has – is this processing technology at industrial scale," he added during a virtual press conference.

Júlio Nery, director of mining affairs at IBRAM, said the country needs infrastructure, technological research, and a cheaper, more abundant energy supply to ramp up production.

Brazil is already one of the world's leading mining countries, producing large quantities of iron ore, gold, bauxite and graphite. It dominates the global supply of niobium – used to strengthen steel.

Who is leading the scramble for rare earths?

In a bid to challenge China's dominance over the rare earth market, the US is actively encouraging exploration in Brazil.

"We see Brazil as a place with the potential for billions [of US dollars] in investment. We are already on that path, with over US\$600 million invested," a US embassy spokesperson, speaking on condition of anonymity, told reporters at an event with investors in March.

During the meeting, Washington signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the state of Goiás in central Brazil to

encourage rare earth mining.

And in April, the American company USA Rare Earth bought Serra Verde – the company operating Brazil's only producing rare earth mine in Goiás – for around US\$2.8 billion.

Australia has also emerged on Brazil's rare earths scene through the company Foxfire Metals, while China has a stake in a project in the Brazilian Amazon, according to IBRAM.

What does the government say?

President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has said he is willing to "make agreements with all countries."

"But no one...will ever lay claim to our wealth," he said.

This week, the leftist leader invited the US to "partner" with Brazil in rare earth exploration, days after meeting US President Donald Trump at the White House, with whom he has had an up-and-down relationship.

This month, the lower house of Congress in Brazil approved a bill offering tax incentives to the private sector to develop the industry, while also increasing state control over it.

The bill gives the executive branch veto power over agreements with foreign companies for reasons of "economic or geopolitical security," something the private sector dislikes.

"What is written there is that the government has the final say in everything. And that is a concern," IBRAM president Pablo Cesário told journalists.

"The expectation is that it will change in the Senate," where it will be debated on a date yet to be determined, the industry leader added. – *AFP*

Lusa News Agency journalists strike to defend independence

LISBON – Journalists from Portugal's state-owned Lusa News Agency went on strike yesterday to protest against reforms they see as a threat to their editorial independence from the government.

No dispatch had been published on the Lusa wire by 9:30 a.m. (local time) and its reporters planned to picket outside parliament yesterday when lawmakers were slated to discuss the newswire's amended statutes.

The protest takes aim at changes

championed by Portugal's centre-right government following the Portuguese state's buyout of private shareholders in the wire service, whose finances are under pressure.

In particular, the journalists oppose making Lusa's editors accountable to parliament, tripling the number of government appointees on the news agency's board from one to three, and the creation of a supervisory body, half of whose members would be appointed by the government. – *AFP*

Mozambique advances strategic transport, energy corridor projects for regional trade

MAPUTO – The Mozambican government has approved a series of strategic transport, port and fuel infrastructure projects to boost regional trade corridors and improve energy security across southern Africa, government spokesperson Inocêncio Impissa said on Tuesday.

Speaking after the Council of Ministers session in Maputo, Impissa said the government had authorized negotiations for several public-private partnership (PPP) concessions involving port infrastructure, logistics corridors, and energy terminals.

Among the approved projects is the Beira Hazardous Cargo Terminal, in central Sofala Province's Dondo district, which will be developed in coordination with Mozambique Ports and Railways to strengthen logistical safety and the specialized handling of hazardous products.

The government also approved negotiations for the concession of infrastructure at the Port of

Quelimane, in the central province of Zambézia, to improve the reception and distribution of fuels.

Another initiative considered strategic is the Savane Corridor Fuel Terminal, Storage, and Pipeline project, which involves Petromoc and Mozambique Ports and Railways.

"The direct adjustment is justified by its strategic dimension to ensure national and regional energy security," he said.

The Council of Ministers also authorized negotiations to develop the Mapinhane-Pafuri Development Corridor in Vilanculos district, Inhambane Province, aimed at strengthening the link between southern Mozambique and the Southern African Development Community regional markets, including South Africa and Zimbabwe.

"The strategic interest is to develop an integration corridor between Inhambane, Gaza, the Pafuri border and regional markets," Impissa added. – *Xinhua*

Mozambique launches 10-year national water security program to expand access, climate resilience

MAPUTO – Mozambican President Daniel Chapo on Monday launched the National Water Security Compact 2026-2036 to expand access to clean water and sanitation while strengthening the country's resilience to climate change and extreme weather events.

During the launch ceremony in Maputo, Chapo described water security as a strategic pillar for national development, public health and economic transformation.

According to Chapo, Mozambique currently has national water supply coverage estimated at 62.6 percent, while sanitation coverage stands at about 38.2 percent. Rural sanitation coverage remains particularly low at 24.6 percent.

The president said the country's growing population and increasingly frequent climate-related disasters are putting additional pressure on water infrastructure and resource management systems.

The program aims to mobilize

approximately US\$4.59 billion to support investments in water supply, sanitation and climate resilience infrastructure, with the goal of increasing national water supply coverage to 75 percent by 2036 while raising sanitation coverage to 60 percent.

The program also includes the construction and rehabilitation of four major dams, 1,000 small reservoirs and dams, more than 300 hydrological monitoring stations, and improved water and sanitation facilities in over 12,000 schools and hundreds of health centers nationwide.

Chapo emphasized the importance of regional cooperation in water resource management, noting that Mozambique shares several river basins with neighboring countries.

"Water should unite peoples, strengthen regional cooperation and promote stability, peace and development in the region," he said.

– *Xinhua*

How are the World Cup favourites shaping up?



Andy Scott

PARIS – With the start of the 2026 World Cup in North America now barely three weeks away, AFP Sport runs the rule over the leading contenders at the first-ever 48-team finals (world ranking in brackets):

France (1)

Les Bleus have won the World Cup twice and lost two finals on penalties in the last seven editions. This will be their last tournament before long-serving coach Didier Deschamps steps down. "It's a strange feeling," admitted Deschamps, in charge since 2012.

France beat Brazil 2-1 in March and then defeated Colombia 3-1 with an entirely different starting line-up, with those games both played in the

US. Unbeaten in nine matches since last June, France have a fearsome attack featuring reigning Ballon d'Or Ousmane Dembele, Kylian Mbappe, Michael Olise and Rayan Cherki. They will take some stopping.

Spain (2)

The European champions have not lost since winning Euro 2024. Luis de la Fuente's team are a perfectly-oiled machine in which the standout player is teenage superstar Lamine Yamal. But the 18-year-old Barcelona winger is currently out with a hamstring injury, and reports suggest he might miss their first two group games.

His Barcelona teammate Fermin Lopez is set to miss out entirely with a foot fracture. Arsenal's Mikel Merino, scorer of eight goals for

Spain in 10 games in 2025, has not played since January due to injury. But La Roja still boast fearsome quality - think 2024 Ballon d'Or winner Rodri, or Pedri.

Argentina (3)

Lionel Scaloni's Argentina are dreaming of retaining the title they won in 2022. That tournament marked Lionel Messi's crowning glory, and it is hard to see how he can hit the same heights again given he turns 39 next month.

Nevertheless, Messi is very much at home in the US now and has 12 goals in 13 MLS games for Inter Miami this year.

Argentina also won the 2024 Copa America in the USA and comfortably topped South American qualifying. Beyond Messi they boast a wealth of attacking talent, including Lautaro Martinez, Julian Alvarez, and Nico Paz, the Tenerife-born attacking midfielder with Como.

England (4)

After several near misses under Gareth Southgate, with agonising defeats in the finals of the last two Euros and exits from the 2018 World Cup in the semi-finals and the 2022 quarters, England now hope German Thomas Tuchel can deliver a first title since 1966.

England cruised through qualifying and have formidable depth but there are some doubts. They drew with Uruguay and lost to Japan in March friendlies, while big names like Jude Bellingham and Cole Palmer have not had straightforward campaigns. However, they will hope Harry Kane continues the remarkable form he has shown with Bayern Munich, for whom he has 58 goals this season.

Portugal (5)

Portugal, who have never gone beyond the semi-finals, are serious candidates - provided they are not held back by the possibly overbearing presence of Cristiano Ronaldo.

At 41, this will be his sixth World Cup, but the quality of their midfield - Vitorinha, Joao Neves, Bernardo Silva, Bruno Fernandes - could be the key.

UEFA Nations League winners last year, Portugal stumbled a little in qualifying, losing in Ireland as Ronaldo was sent off. Ronaldo did not play in their last game, a 2-0 friendly win over the USA in Atlanta.

Brazil (6)

Brazil's progress under new coach Carlo Ancelotti will be fascinating to watch. That the Seleção felt it necessary to turn to

an Italian says much about Brazil's ongoing footballing identity crisis, and their current lack of depth has been exposed by Ancelotti's decision to name Neymar in his squad.

Now 34 and playing for Santos, Neymar has not been capped since 2023, and Vinicius Junior is Brazil's attacking leader now.

Since winning their fifth title in 2002, Brazil have only reached the semi-finals once, when they were humiliated 7-1 by Germany as hosts in 2014. They finished fifth in South American qualifying, losing six of 18 games.

"The World Cup won't be won by a perfect team -because a perfect team doesn't exist," insists Ancelotti. "It will be won by the most resilient team."

Germany (10)

Julian Nagelsmann's side sit behind the Netherlands, Morocco and Belgium in the rankings and it seems a stretch to suggest Germany could win a first World Cup since 2014.

They suffered group-stage exits in 2018 and 2022, and lost in the Euro 2024 quarter-finals as hosts. However, the class of Joshua Kimmich, Florian Wirtz and Kai Havertz ensure Germany should be taken seriously. - AFP

N Korean women win rare match in South to reach final

Kang Jin-kyu



SUWON, South Korea – North Korea's first sports team to visit the South in eight years reached the Asian Women's Champions League final yesterday as Naegohyang Women's FC beat Suwon FC Women 2-1.

Naegohyang came from behind to defeat their rivals from the South amid torrential rain in Suwon, in a hard-fought semi-final played in a fair spirit without any major flashpoints.

Suwon captain Ji So-yun missed a penalty with just over 10 minutes to play.

The North Koreans hugged each other and wept at the full-time whistle as the Suwon players slumped to the turf.

"We believed in our team's ability," said Naegohyang's Choe Kum Ok, who scored her team's equaliser in the second half.

"If all of us stay united, neither the semi-final or final will be a problem for us."

The North Koreans will stay in the South for Saturday's final, where they will take on Japan's Tokyo Verdy Belezza at the same stadium.

"Every player's role is important, but things didn't go well for us in the first half," said Choe.

"Once we got into the second half, we found our rhythm and I think the game flowed much better for us."

Interest in the rare North-South semi-final was intense, and 7,087 general admission tickets sold out within hours of going on sale last week.

A woman in her 70s who gave her surname as Lee told AFP before kick-off that she lived nearby and attended the match "hoping to catch a glimpse of the North Korean players".

"I'll cheer for both teams, although I'm rooting slightly more for the North since they travelled such a long way to get here," she said.

Bad weather meant half the seats in the roofless Suwon Sports

Complex Stadium were empty.

A large group of spectators from civic groups backed by Seoul's unification ministry were in the stadium to support both teams, although they were mostly silent.

Fast and fair

Suwon fans banged drums and chanted for their team.

"Regardless of whether the opposing team is from North Korea or any other country, we really hope we win, make it to the final, and show just how strong our women's football team is," said 29-year-old Suwon fan Kweon Yun-young.

There were no official away supporters because North Koreans are generally not allowed into the South, and the two countries have technically remained at war since 1950.

The two teams had met in the group stage earlier in the competition, with Naegohyang winning 3-0.

Former Chelsea midfielder Ji said Suwon were expecting the semi-final to be a tough physical battle and were ready to give as good as they got.

The action was fast and fair as both teams created early chances.

Naegohyang had a goal ruled out for offside in the fifth minute, and Suwon's Japanese striker Haruhi Suzuki headed against the post midway through the first half.

Suzuki gave Suwon the lead in the 49th minute when she pounced on a chance with the Naegohyang defence hesitating.

The North Koreans equalised six minutes later when Choe headed home from a free-kick.

Prolific striker Kim Kyong Yong then gave Naegohyang the lead when she finished off a scrappy attack with a header in the 67th minute.

Suwon were awarded a penalty after a VAR review, but Ji hit her spot kick wide with the goalkeeper diving the wrong way.

Tokyo beat Australia's Melbourne City 3-1 in the other semi-final earlier in the day. - AFP



Arsenal fans celebrate their team winning the English Premier League, outside the Emirates Stadium in London on Tuesday. Arsenal celebrated their first Premier League title for 22 years late on Tuesday after Manchester City were held to a 1-1 draw by Bournemouth, sparking wild scenes of joy around the Emirates Stadium.

- AFP

Silva says it's time for new Man City generation to shine



LONDON - Bernardo Silva believes it is time for a new generation to take the lead at Manchester City.

The 31-year-old City captain will leave the Etihad Stadium after nine trophy-laden years when his contract expires at the end of the season.

Tuesday's 1-1 draw at Bournemouth ended City's bid to win the Premier League title, with Arsenal crowned champions as a result, but the club have won both the League Cup and FA Cup this season.

In a farewell interview with the club's website, Silva thanked City manager Pep Guardiola and said the side had been unlucky not to win more Champions League titles.

"It's never enough, but I feel that we won a lot, our generation," said Silva. "I feel that also it's time for these young guys to have their moment."

"And for me personally, it's an opportunity to go a bit closer to

my family... Even though I love the football club and I loved the nine years here, I feel it's the right moment for me to have a new challenge in my life - it's going to be good."

The Portugal midfielder has made 459 appearances for City in total, scoring 76 goals, since joining from Monaco in 2017.

He has won 15 major trophies with the club, including four successive Premier League titles from 2021-2024, the treble featuring the Champions League in 2023 and all four domestic trophies in the 2018/19 season.

"Even though the Champions League adds something special to it, to win a domestic quadruple was really tough, especially against that Liverpool team," said Silva.

"But if I have to choose one, I think the treble because the Champions League for this club - the only one that we won, it edges it a little bit."

Widespread reports have said

that Guardiola will stand down after City's final game at home to Aston Villa on Sunday. Silva said Guardiola had been his "idol" long before he arrived in Manchester.

"Way before I joined Man City, Pep for me was always an inspiration because when he was training Barcelona, that team with the small guys, with Xavi, (Andres) Iniesta, (Lionel) Messi, Pedro," said Silva.

"I was at the time in Benfica in my academy years where I didn't play because they thought that I wasn't big enough, that I wasn't strong enough."

"And me looking at that team and thinking, 'these guys, they're also not big, they're also not strong. If they can do it, maybe one day I can do it'."

"So, Pep's team was always an inspiration for me and then to join the club and to be able to be with him nine years and to be a part of this success, it's fantastic." - AFP

China enjoys strong Day 2 at Malaysia Masters

Badminton

KUALA LUMPUR – China maintained its momentum on Day 2 of the 2026 Malaysia Masters yesterday, with players advancing to the second round in all five events.

China's men's singles players enjoyed a strong day. Lu Guangzu edged Jason Gunawan of Hong Kong, 21-17, 17-21, 21-18 in a grueling match lasting one hour and 20 minutes, while Hu Zhean defeated Malaysia's Leong Jun Hao 21-19, 23-21.

Li Shifeng came from behind to beat Japan's Minoru Koga 17-21, 22-20, 21-15, and Zhu Xuanchen defeated Canada's Brian Yang 21-18, 22-20.

In women's singles, Han Qianxi overcame Japan's Natsuki Nidaira 24-22, 21-13, while Olympic champion Chen Yufei eased past Canada's Wen Yu Zhang 21-14, 21-13.

In men's doubles, Hu Keyuan and Lin Xiangyi beat Indonesia's Leo Rolly Carnando and Daniel Marthin 21-19, 13-21, 21-15.



Cheng Xing (second left)/Zhang Chi and Hoo Pang Ron (first left)/Lai Pei Jing (second right) acknowledge each other after the mixed doubles round of 32 match between Cheng Xing/Zhang Chi of China and Hoo Pang Ron/Lai Pei Jing of Malaysia at 2026 Malaysia Masters badminton tournament in Kuala Lumpur, yesterday. – Xinhua

Women's doubles pair Bao Lijing and Cao Zihan defeated Malaysia's Low Zi Yu and Noraqilah Maisarah Ramdan 21-18, 21-12.

China also had a strong showing in mixed doubles. Guo Xinwa and Chen Fanghui edged Japan's Akira Koga and Natsu Saito 21-19, 12-21, 22-20, while Cheng Xing and Zhang Chi beat Malaysia's Hoo Pang Ron

and Lai Pei Jing 13-21, 21-12, 21-16.

Zhu Yijun and Li Qian defeated Germany's Marvin Seidel and Thuc Phuong Nguyen 21-11, 13-21, 21-19, and Gao Jiaxuan and Wei Yaxin beat Indonesia's Dejan Ferdinansyah and Bernadine Anindya Wardana 21-19, 21-19.

The 2026 Malaysia Masters runs until Sunday. – Xinhua

Eala & Tjen bring a Southeast Asian 'sense of pride' to Roland Garros

Tennis

Peter Berlin

PARIS – Alexandra Eala and Janice Tjen have taken different routes to the women's top 40, but both began their journeys from a region that is rarely on the tennis map.

In January, Eala, who turns 21 the day before Roland Garros starts, became the first player from the Philippines to break into the top 50.

Tjen turned 24 earlier in May. When she entered the top 40 in February, she became the highest-ranked Indonesian woman since Yayuk Basuki, who reached the top 20 in 1997 and 1998.

While their far-flung countries are more than 1,500 kilometres apart, they share a maritime border. The impact of the sometime doubles partners, not only on the court but in the stands, has brought them the nickname 'SEASters'.

The huge Filipino expat population flock to see their first tennis star everywhere she plays.

"The start of the season is when I seriously noticed that people were really coming, they were buying tickets, they were taking time out of their day. It was like, wow," world number 38 Eala told the Served website.

She added she had been a "little bit in denial" about her popularity.

"After I broke that barrier of not accepting, thinking, 'I don't think I'm really famous', every week they just kept coming, so I was, 'Okay, you have to accept it, absorb it, it's here, it's a really good position'."

Her opponents notice

"I love that she has such an incredible fan base. I've seen the atmosphere. It's amazing," American Amanda Anisimova said in Dubai.

Yet, Eala is cautious.

"I want to give back all the support they give me, but my first obligation is to myself," she told the Punto de Break website.

Representing a nation of 288 million, 41st-ranked Tjen is also proving a draw.

"I don't think too much about it," she told the *Times of India* ahead of a Billie Jean King Cup match in Delhi in April.

"I know that as long as I keep working hard and giving my best, I always have Indonesia behind me. That's something I'm proud of."

Two Thai women, Lanlana Tara-rudee and Mananchaya Sawangkaew are also hovering around the top 100.

"I think Southeast Asia has its own little charm. We have certain humour that's very similar, maybe cultural things that we share. There's definitely that shared sense of pride for my region."

Eala left home aged 12 to join the Rafael Nadal Academy in Mallorca. She won the US Open junior singles in 2022.

'Tennis demands a lot'

After breaking into the top 50 last season, she became the first person to hit with Nadal since his retirement over a year earlier.

"It was crazy," Eala told *The National*. "It was my first time ever hitting with him and I was so nervous and it was definitely physically demanding for me."

"Just to say that you hit with Rafa, it's insane."

She has Nadal's willingness to go to the limits.

After beating Magdalena Frech in a tough three-setter at the Italian Open earlier this month, she said on Tennis Channel: "I told myself that I wasn't tired enough."

Eala is a lefty, like Nadal, but has not yet displayed the 14-time Roland Garros champion's love for clay.

"I'm starting to build that relationship," she said in Rome. "This is my first season where I've really done these high-level tournaments."

Tjen developed later on tennis scholarships at US universities, spending one year at Oregon and three at Pepperdine by the beach in Malibu. She has hardly any experience on clay and played her first tour-level matches on the surface in April.

"So I'm just taking things one at a time," she told the Roland Garros website.

She also admitted she had previously held doubts about pursuing a tennis career.

"Tennis demands a lot of you," she told the *Times of India*.

"You basically have to travel every week of your life and that's a very tough demand for me. I don't like travelling as much and considering that I wouldn't be able to enjoy it and being away from home for that long I decided to quit, but I had a lot of good people around me and they kept convincing me to give it a try." – AFP

Borthwick to monitor Lawes as England great targets Test recall

Rugby

LONDON – England coach Steve Borthwick will closely watch Courtney Lawes's form in next season's Prem Rugby competition as the veteran forward bids to make an international comeback.

Lawes, at home in either the second or back row of the pack, retired from Test rugby following the 2023 World Cup.

But he now has the chance to revive his England career, having joined Sale ahead of the new English season after a two-year stint at French second-division club Brive.

The 37-year-old, capped 105 times, is not being considered for England's opening July matches in the new Nations Championship against South Africa, Fiji and Argentina, even though he becomes eligible for selection once the Pro D2 campaign in France is finished.

Borthwick, however, is well aware of Lawes's quality and the former England captain will also be keeping an eye on centre Joe

Marchant, another Sale signing following a spell at Stade Francais, in the run-up to the 2027 World Cup in Australia.

"I'm certainly looking forward to watching Courtney in the Prem against other players who are eligible, as I am with Joe Marchant," said Borthwick.

"Watching him in Pro D2, the context is slightly different but I know that Courtney is a proven Test match player and a proven leader."

"Courtney wanting to come back shows what an incredible character and fantastic leader he is."

'Character'

If Lawes makes it to next year's global showpiece, it will be his fifth World Cup and his leadership skills could yet prove invaluable to England.

"When we took the lead against Fiji in the quarter-final of the last World Cup, Fiji threw everything at us," recalled Borthwick. "At a critical moment, Courtney stepped up to win a crucial turnover."

In the more immediate future, England face a gruelling travel schedule of some 25,000 miles (40,000 kilometres) across three continents with a trio of matches on successive weekends.

Borthwick's men launch their Nations Cup campaign against world champions South Africa in Johannesburg on July 4 before returning home for a clash with Fiji in Liverpool and then heading to Santiago del Estero to play Argentina.

England head into the new competition on the back of a woeful Six Nations, where they suffered four defeats in five games and lost to Italy for the first time.

"Three matches in three weeks on three continents is... quite a challenge," said Borthwick, who has no plans to split his squad during the tour.

"I'm excited by challenges like this and I'm looking forward to learning even more about the players – who gets enthused and loves a challenge like this and who steps up." – AFP

Taijul takes 6 to lead Bangladesh to Pakistan Test series sweep

Cricket

SYLHET, Bangladesh – Spinner Taijul Islam took six wickets to lead Bangladesh to a 78-run win over Pakistan in the second Test and clinch a famous 2-0 series win yesterday.

Pakistan, who started the fifth day on 316-7 chasing a record 437, were bowled out for 328 in the first session in Sylhet after Mohammad Rizwan hit a valiant 94.

It was Bangladesh's first Test series win at home against Pakistan and a second successive sweep after their 2-0 triumph on Pakistani soil in 2024.

The win marked another major milestone for Bangladesh, who secured four successive Test series victories for the first time in their history.

"It's difficult to explain the emotions of that final hour because Pakistan were batting really well and we were under pressure," Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto said.

"But compared to previous matches, we controlled our emotions better and avoided panic."

"Every player and member of the support staff contributed, and as captain I feel very proud of the team's work ethic."

Wicketkeeper Rizwan kept Pakistan in the hunt for an unlikely win with a 166-ball stay after the visitors had slumped to 162-5 on day four.

Rizwan put on an eighth-wicket partnership of 54 with overnight partner Sajid Khan, who made 28.

Taijul broke through to dismiss Sajid for his 18th Test five-wicket haul and pace bowler Shoriful Islam had Rizwan caught in the next over to end Pakistan's resistance.

"It's never good to lose games," said Pakistan skipper Shan Masood.

"In both matches we had significant chances, but we need to

reflect on where we lost the game in batting, bowling and fielding if we want to move forward as a side."

Taijul took the final wicket of Khurram Shahzad to return second-innings figures of 6-120 and trigger the Bangladesh celebrations.

Taijul's four wickets on Tuesday had left Pakistan in deep trouble.

Former captain Babar Azam counter-attacked with 47 before wicketkeeper Litton Das produced a stunning catch off Taijul.

Captain Masood made 71, while Salman Ali Agha added 71 in a crucial 134-run sixth-wicket stand with

Rizwan before Taijul broke through.

Taijul, a left-arm spinner also took 3-67 during Pakistan's first innings 232.

Litton, who was named player of the match, scored 126 in Bangladesh's first-innings 278.

Veteran batsman Mushfiqur Rahim scored 137 in the second to guide Bangladesh to 390, with contributions from Mahmudul Hasan Joy (52) and Litton (69).

The 39-year-old Mushfiqur was named player of the series for his 253 runs in two matches.

Bangladesh won the opening Test by 104 runs. – AFP

‘The Four Seasons’ star Tina Fey says old friends are gold

Paula Ramon

HOLLYWOOD – US actress Tina Fey hopes the latest instalment of Netflix comedy ‘The Four Seasons’ will inspire viewers to pick up the phone and check in with old friends.

“Lifelong friendships are what really hold it together,” Fey told AFP at a premier for the new season, which drops on May 28.

“It’s great to be married but you also meet your friends to keep the married people safe,” she said from the red carpet at Hollywood’s Egyptian Theater on Tuesday.

“The Four Seasons,” which first premiered a year ago, is based on the Alan Alda film of the same name that follows a group of friends as they navigate life’s challenges.

The new season will take the group – played by Fey, Colman Domingo, Will Forte, Marco Calvani, Kerri Kenney-Silver and Erika Henningsen – on an adventure through Italy as they deal with the death of their friend Nick (Steve Carell).

The group’s on-screen connection extends to the real world, cast members said.

“We are friends in real life as well... I think you feel that, I think it comes off the screen,” Kenney-Silver said, adding that “the universal story of friendship” is key to the show’s success.

While the show sees the friends – who stay in touch via group chat even when they are not filming – face the challenges of adulthood,

they believe it has the potential to attract a multigenerational audience.

“We’re a bunch of oldies, but everyone gets stressed, everyone suffers loss and gets sad, everyone’s happy, everyone has people in their life they love and people who annoy them,” Forte said.

“So, you know, it’s all relatable stuff.”

“Even if you’re not the age we are, we’re like a museum piece,” the actor added. “Check out these old artifacts, learn something.”

– AFP



US actress Boots Riley poses upon arrival for the Los Angeles premiere of Neon’s ‘I Love Boosters’ at the DGA Theater Complex last Wednesday in Los Angeles, California. – AFP

Elephant in the room: Nepal’s first Cannes film takes on taboos

Fiachra Gibbons

CANNES – Film director Abinash Bikram Shah has taken on two of Nepal’s touchiest subjects in ‘Elephants in the Fog’ – the way it treats its trans women and its wild elephants.

It seems an odd combination, but the two come together in his hauntingly beautiful directorial debut at the Cannes Film Festival about the perils of not acknowledging nature – both human and animal.

Shah – the first Nepali to make the festival’s official selection – is no provocateur. So soft spoken you have to lean in to hear him, he used to work for the Nepal Tourism Board, promoting the stunning Himalayan nation.

But as he told AFP before its premiere yesterday, “Nepal is changing” in very big ways.

Last year the arthritic old order was toppled by a youth revolution, with Gen-Z protesters taking to the streets with the Jolly Roger flag from the manga ‘One Piece’.

Then in March Nepalis elected 36-year-old rapper Balendra Shah prime minister – the world’s youngest – by a landslide.

Ancient third gender

Shah – no relation is proud and excited for his homeland.

Nepal is also one of fewer than two dozen nations that recognise a third gender, and a pioneer on LGBTQ+ rights in Asia.

But Shah said much of that tolerance “is just on paper”. And he



(From left to right) Nepalese director and screenwriter Abinash Bikram Shah, Nepalese actress Jasmine Bishwokarma, Nepalese actress Aliz Ghimire and Nepalese actress Pushpa Thing Lama pose during a photocall of their film ‘Elephants in the Fog’ at the 79th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France, on Wednesday. – AFP

wonders how his touching thriller will be received back home.

It centres on the matriarch of a traditional transsexual household in the south of the country where villagers battle nightly to scare off wild elephants from the shrinking forests that surround it.

The Kinnar community, called Hijra or the third sex in India, has ancient cultural and religious roots in the subcontinent, both in Hinduism and Islam.

They sing and dance and their blessings are auspicious for births and weddings or to scare off evil spirits.

Gender realignment is called “emasculatation” in Nepal, Shah said, but the Kinnar “have another very beautiful word for it, ‘Nirvana.’”

Many live together in strictly organised Kinnar families, he said, each led by a mother who in turn looks to a Kinnar guru.

Ignoring the haters

Shah became obsessed by their little-known inner lives as he scrolled TikTok during lockdown.

He was hugely taken by the “joyful videos they posted – singing, dancing, joking”, but also by their collective courage in the face of “so many shocking hate remarks”.

Most Nepalese people “see Kinnar just as having this ability to bless them or as prostitutes,” he said.

So he is delighted that so far the reaction to the trailer for ‘Elephants in the Fog’ has been positive.

“Either something is changed

or they don’t realise it’s a trans woman,” he said, as it features the remarkable Kinnar activist Pushpa Thing Lama.

She had never acted but Shah realised he had found someone with a screen presence you can’t teach.

Elephants being squeezed

“When she is joyful she is so joyful,” the director said, “but when she is quiet she has this calm and silence you can’t take your eyes from.”

Shah said he wanted to show how the Kinnar are at once a central part of Nepalese and Indian culture and at the same time pushed to the fringes.

Most Kinnar “start as sex workers”, Shah said, “because they are thrown out by their families. Then, when they are frustrated with that life, they join a Kinnar family,” taking a vow of chastity, he said.

Shah spent two years reaching out to the Kinnar community and to villagers in the south of the country where the film was shot, who also played themselves.

As for the elephants, their habitat is being squeezed all over Nepal as forests and jungles are cut down.

“Elephants are very smart, and they move around on ancient routes... like GPS in their brains, so if [people] put up fences they will just go through them,” Shah said.

There is a saying in Nepal, he said: “Run into the river if you see a rhino. Climb a tree if you see a tiger. But for an elephant just pray to God.”

– AFP

Boots Riley says new film ‘I Love Boosters’ is an ‘optimistic’ satire

Paula Ramon

LOS ANGELES – US director Boots Riley’s signature absurdism is all over his latest film ‘I Love Boosters,’ which opens in US cinemas this week, but the wacky visuals are all in service of an “optimistic” social commentary.

“I Love Boosters” follows a ragtag group of women who steal clothes from designer retailers and resell them on the cheap – but what begins as a means to an end escalates into an all-out class war.

The neon-coloured comedy stars an ensemble cast featuring

Keke Palmer, Demi Moore, LaKeith Stanfield, Naomi Ackie and Eiza Gonzalez, among others.

Riley, the writer-director behind 2018’s ‘Sorry to Bother You,’ said he revisited the absurdist aesthetic of his first film because he found it helped convey his message.

“I want the audience to feel what that character is going through,” Riley told a Los Angeles press conference promoting the film last Wednesday. “And that doesn’t just come through the absurdist concepts that come within the frame, but it goes to the rhythm.”

To help bring his vision to life, Riley enlisted costume designer Shirley Kurata, the Oscar-nominated stylist behind the equally surreal ‘Everything Everywhere All at Once.’

“What all I’m doing is weirdly, even though this is more fantastical, it’s more real in that sense,” Riley said.

“It’s talking about what is actually happening in the world and what the conflicts are.”

But Riley stressed the film is not a downer portrayal of the struggle between social classes.

“It’s also optimistic. It’s saying that there is a way to change things. There is a way for us to struggle collectively,” he said.

Ackie, who stars as “Sade” in the film, said the key element in ‘I Love Boosters’ is the power of human connection.

“When we think about how we can change the world, make it a better place, the ideas are very big – like overturn the system, burn it all down,” the British actress said.

“That feels valid, but it starts small, and it starts by daily actions, and this idea of sisterhood felt like a really strong theme in this film.”

– AFP



US director Boots Riley poses upon arrival for the Los Angeles premiere of Neon’s ‘I Love Boosters’ at the DGA Theater Complex last Wednesday in Los Angeles, California. – AFP

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 17°C~27°C	Manila 25°C~35°C	New York 12°C~17°C	Lisbon 17°C~30°C
Shanghai 17°C~29°C	Bangkok 26°C~36°C	London 13°C~23°C	Rio de Janeiro 19°C~22°C
Hong Kong 24°C~28°C	Tokyo 14°C~23°C	Frankfurt 11°C~24°C	Luanda 21°C~26°C
Taipei 25°C~34°C	Singapore 25°C~31°C	Vancouver 11°C~21°C	Maputo 15°C~26°C
Guangzhou 24°C~28°C	Kuala Lumpur 25°C~35°C	Paris 12°C~24°C	Dili 24°C~31°C
Nanjing 16°C~28°C	Jakarta 24°C~33°C	Moscow 17°C~30°C	São Tomé 26°C~31°C
Guilin 21°C~27°C	Seoul 12°C~20°C	Las Vegas 20°C~34°C	Praia 20°C~28°C
Xi’an 17°C~25°C	Sydney 15°C~19°C	Monte Carlo 16°C~23°C	Bissau 22°C~34°C



Favourite mammals

People enjoy a drone show featuring dolphins at the Sea World Culture and Arts Centre (SWCAC) in Shenzhen, Guangdong province yesterday, on the eve of Drone World Congress (DWC).
- AFP

Joy bringers

Rope access technicians dressed as superheroes abseil down a facade of the University Hospital of Lausanne (CHUV) Children's Hospital to mark first anniversary of the new building in Lausanne, Switzerland yesterday.
- AFP



Mighty protectors

National Park Service Rangers on horseback patrol for elk to help keep them safe from grizzly bears during calving yesterday in Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming. Yellowstone National Park became the nation's first national park on March 1, 1872, when President Ulysses S. Grant signed a congressional act protecting the land "for the benefit and enjoyment of the people."
- AFP



Tiny survivor

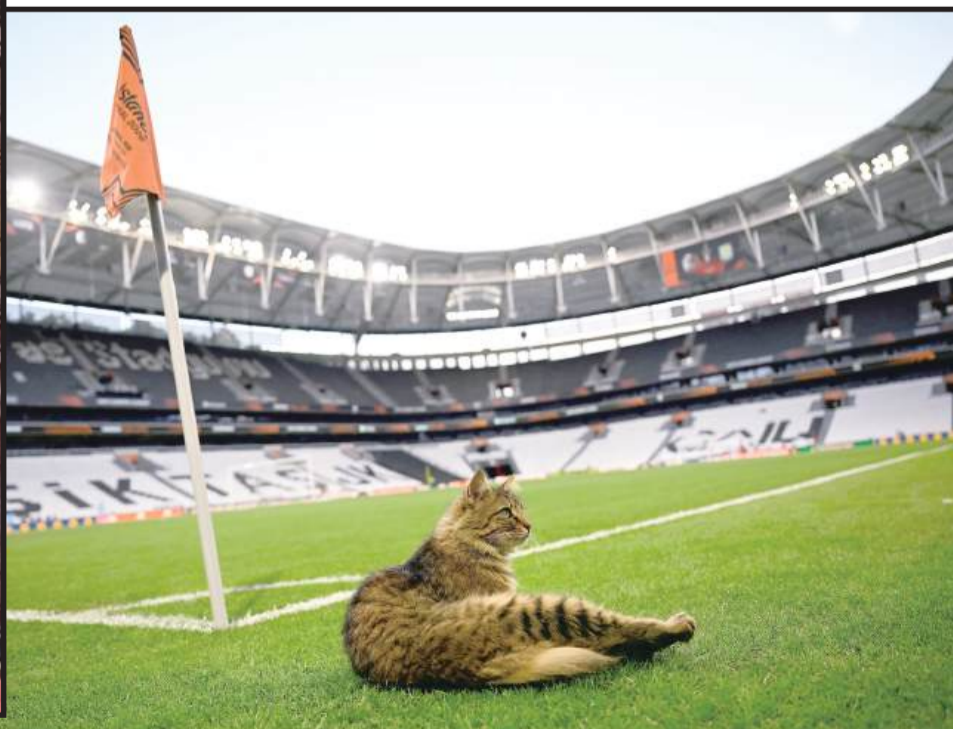
A long-eared owl sits in an aviary at the Sadyba Nyushanik centre in the village of Voropaiv, Kyiv region on April 28.

Threatened in peacetime by deforestation, intensive agriculture, urbanisation, pollution, hunting and climate change, The war since 2022 has wrought yet more suffering on Ukraine's birdlife.
- AFP



Italian adventure

A senior year student at St. Julian High School holds a decorative umbrella while walking the red carpet at their prom party themed "A Night in Italy" in Gayaza, Uganda on Tuesday.
- AFP



Villa's spycat

A cat sits by a corner flag during SC Freiburg's training session at the Tupras stadium in Istanbul on Tuesday, on the eve of the UEFA Europa League final against Aston Villa.
- AFP