

Govt still studying senior canteen plan for Seac Pai Van

Social welfare chief stresses healthy menus

Tony Wong

The government's social welfare chief said yesterday that it is studying the modus operandi of its plan to provide healthy menus for senior citizens in the community in collaboration with the restaurant sector, as it is still gathering opinions on the matter from various segments of civil society including the sector.

Yesterday's remarks came after the government's initial plan to launch a pilot programme last month to run Macau's first-ever community canteen for senior citizens, in Coloane's Seac Pai Van public housing neighbourhood, with each beneficiary expected to pay 20 patacas per meal thanks to a 15-pataca government subsidy.

However, the government said late last month that it had decided to suspend the programme as it was still working on the canteen's final modus operandi.

The government's latest remarks about the scheme were made by Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) President Wilson Hon Wai when speaking to reporters yesterday at Macau Tower after addressing a one-day forum hosted by the Macau Women's General Association (commonly known as Fu Luen) to



Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) President Wilson Hon Wai talks to reporters at the Macau Tower Convention and Entertainment Centre yesterday.

celebrate the 76th anniversary of its establishment.

When asked by the media yesterday afternoon whether the government was still planning to stick to a fixed price proposal when pushing ahead with its senior canteen programme, like the 20-pataca-per-meal plan mentioned



Residents walk in Coloane's Seac Pai Van public housing community last month.

– Photos: Tony Wong

previously, Hon said that the government was now "open to different possibilities, not restricted to any particular model".

Hon underlined that regardless of its modus operandi in the future, the ultimate aim of the initiative was to enable the silver generation to gain easy access to healthy menus

provided "by the market".

The government's proposed senior canteen pilot programme was first revealed in late March when Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Wallis O Lam addressed a Q&A session in the legislature's hemicycle. O said at that time that the government was planning to create



Macau's first 15-minute "community service circle" for senior citizens in the Seac Pai Van public housing neighbourhood on a pilot basis within this year. As a component of the 15-minute community service circle for seniors, O said, the government was planning to launch a pilot programme in the Seac Pai Van public housing neighbourhood in April to run a canteen for senior citizens there.

The sprawling Seac Pai Van public housing neighbourhood comprises a social rental housing estate and three subsidised home-ownership scheme (HOS) estates.

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Firefighters from Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau yesterday "rescue" a passenger in a traffic accident during a joint exercise conducted in an area of the site where the now-defunct Macau Jockey Club horse-racing track in Taipa is located. Fire services authorities from Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau are carrying out a joint exercise in Macau lasting three days with the main one conducted yesterday, the second day of the three-day exercise, with the aim of testing their joint capabilities to carry out emergency and rescue operations in compliance with the cooperation agreements signed between the three places. A total of 114 firefighters and 23 fire engines from Guangdong and Hong Kong arrived in Macau on Wednesday afternoon via the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) for the joint exercise, and they are scheduled to return via the delta bridge this afternoon. Yesterday's main exercise was also conducted on a construction site on Avenida Wai Long (偉龍馬路) in Taipa near the airport, in addition to the former Macau Jockey Club site. The scenario of yesterday's exercise simulated Macau being affected by a super typhoon and a storm surge, including operations to tackle different disasters such as chemical leakage, traffic accidents, building collapse, and basement flooding.

– Caption: Staff Reporter. Photo: GCS

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The Macau Post Daily

Xi, Pakistani president exchange congratulations on 75th anniversary of diplomatic ties

President Xi Jinping and Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari yesterday exchanged congratulatory messages on the 75th anniversary of diplomatic ties between the two countries.

– Story on p. 7

Taliban's new marriage separation decree draws UN criticism

The Taliban government's new decree governing the separation of spouses "reinforces systemic discrimination" and erodes the rights of Afghan women and girls, the United Nations said yesterday.

– Story on p. 9

Cuba outraged after US indicts Raul Castro

Cubans expressed their shock and indignation after the United States indicted former president Raúl Castro on murder charges on Wednesday, a stunning new step in President Donald Trump's pressure on the communist state.

– Story on p. 12

JEBN brand lily bulbs contain excessive cadmium: IAM



This undated handout provided by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) yesterday shows an octopus salad sample found to contain Listeria.

Gongbei Customs seizes 5 rolled cannabis cigarettes

Armindo Neves

Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs announced in a statement yesterday that its officers seized five rolled cannabis cigarettes (commonly known as joints) at Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) recently.

According to the statement, while conducting routine monitoring at the arrivals hall for vehicle passengers at the mega bridge's Zhuhai checkpoint, customs officers noticed a traveller using the "green channel" who appeared evasive, walking with a hurried gait.

They stopped the traveller for inspection, the statement said, adding that the customs officers found an opened cigarette pack in the traveller's coat pocket.

A pungent odour was detected while opening the

pack, the statement said, leading the officers to five hand-rolled cigarettes inside the pack.

According to the statement, the five hand-rolled cigarettes were tested and found to contain cannabis components, with a net weight of 1.26 grams. The case has been transferred to the customs anti-smuggling department for further handling.

Gongbei Customs reminded the public that drugs refer to opium, heroin, methamphetamine (crystal meth), morphine, cannabis, cocaine, and other narcotics and psychotropic substances regulated by the state that cause addiction. Regardless of the quantity involved, the smuggling, trafficking, transportation, or manufacturing of narcotics is subject to criminal liability and criminal penalties. ■



This undated handout photo provided by Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs yesterday shows 5 rolled cannabis cigarettes seized by its officers at the HZMB Zhuhai Port (checkpoint) recently.

Armindo Neves

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) urged the public in a statement yesterday to cease consumption of dried lily bulbs found to contain excessive levels of cadmium, underlining that the retailers involved have been ordered to stop selling the problematic product.

The statement said that the bureau was informed by the Hong Kong Centre for Food Safety about the health hazard.

According to the statement, the bags of dried lily bulbs weighing 303 grams were sold locally of the JEBN (樓上) brand from Hong Kong, labelled "best before 30 NOV 2026", which have been found to contain 0.53 parts per million of heavy metal cadmium. The statement underlined that the amount exceeds the legal limits.

In the statement, the bureau pointed out that cadmium is a heavy metal contaminant, and long-term intake can lead to chronic poisoning, causing damage to kidney function in humans. Based on an analysis of the cadmium levels detected in the affected sample, under normal consumption conditions, the likelihood

of adverse health effects from the product is low, the bureau said.

Local 'salad' product found to contain Listeria

Meanwhile, the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) also announced in a separate statement that Listeria has been detected in "salad" product samples.

The statement said that through a routine food sampling, an octopus salad sample taken from the "3 Sardines" (三沙丁) Portuguese Restaurant on Rua de S. Roque (聖祿杞街) was found to contain Listeria monocytogenes at a level classified as "unsatisfactory."

The bureau has ordered the eatery to cease selling the problematic products, rectify its production and handling procedures, and thoroughly clean and disinfect all equipment and utensils, the statement said, adding that the sale of the product may only be resumed after passing a follow-up inspection and re-testing.

The statement also said that the person in charge has also been required to arrange for the restaurant's employees to attend

the bureau's "Food Hygiene Supervision Course" to strengthen their awareness of hygiene practices.

According to Hong Kong's Centre for Health Protection (CHP), listeriosis is caused by the bacteria Listeria monocytogenes which is commonly found in the natural environment. The bacteria may be found in some contaminated raw foods, such as vegetables and uncooked meats as well as unpasteurised milk.

A person with listeriosis usually comes down with fever, headache, and sometimes gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea. Some patients may develop severe complications such as meningoencephalitis or septicemia (blood poisoning). Pregnant women, newborns/infants, the elderly and persons with chronic diseases or weakened immunity are at higher risk of being infected. Although pregnant women with listeriosis are mostly asymptomatic or only develop mild symptoms, they may transmit the infection to their fetuses or newborns, resulting in miscarriage, stillbirth, preterm birth and septicemia or meningitis in newborns. ■

Police nab mainlander for falsely accusing friend of theft

Armindo Neves

The Judiciary Police (PJ) arrested a man from the Chinese mainland for falsely accusing a friend of theft, PJ spokesman Cheong Kim Fong said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Cheong identified the suspect as a 41-year-old male surnamed Wei, who claimed that he is unemployed.

According to Cheong, the Judiciary Police received a notification from a hotel in Cotai on Tuesday about a theft case.

PJ officers contacted Wei regarding the theft, according to Cheong. Wei claimed that a man he met at a casino had stolen HK\$30,000 (30,900 patacas) in chips from his hotel room at 10 a.m. last Saturday.

Wei told the police that he had checked into the hotel with the man at 5 a.m. that day, placed the chips on the bedside table, and then fell asleep, according to Cheong. When Wei woke up, according to his

version, both the man and the chips were gone.

However, Cheong said that a follow-up investigation showed that upon reviewing surveillance footage, PJ officers confirmed that Wei had been in and out of the room together with the man every time and neither had ever left the room alone – contradicting the suspect's claim that the man had left the room first.

PJ officer summoned Wei for questioning on Wednesday. Cheong said that under questioning, PJ officers noticed that Wei's testimony was found to be contradictory and his explanations unreasonable.

When asked again for more details about the case, according to Cheong, Wei admitted that he had actually lent the HK\$30,000 in chips to the man and had subsequently lost contact with him.

In an attempt to use police resources to locate the man, Wei fabricated the theft and falsely



Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Cheong Kim Fong looks on during yesterday's regular press conference.

– Photo: Armindo Neves

accused him, according to Cheong.

Wei has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) on Wednesday, facing a false accusation charge. ■

Drones to be banned during APEC Tourism Ministers' Meeting near Macau Tower & Forum Macao

Khalel Vallo

The flying of unmanned aircraft or drones will be banned during the 67th APEC Tourism Working Group Meeting from June 24 to 28, the Civil Aviation Authority (AACM) announced in a statement on Wednesday.

The ban is in accordance with Paragraph 66 of the Air Navigation Regulation of Macao.

The statement noted that the ban covers a 500-metre radius

around Macau Tower in Sai Van and the Complex of Commerce and Trade Cooperation Platform for China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (PSCs), aka Forum Macao, in Nam Van.

According to the statement, violations will result in penalties imposed by the Civil Aviation Authority pursuant to Paragraph 2 of Article 59 of Law No. 4/2025 (Civil Aviation Activity Law). ■



This poster provided by the Civil Aviation Authority of Macau (AACM) yesterday shows its drone ban logo.

Published since Aug 2004

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- Chatbots: DeepSeek, Gemini, Poe
- Wire services – AFP, Xinhua

Macau Weather

CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY INTERVALS.
A FEW SHOWERS.
FORCE 3 TO 4 SOUTHERLY WINDS.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 75% AND 95%.



25°C~30°C

Source: SMG

Buddha's Birthday public holiday

Due to it being the Buddha's Birthday public holiday on Sunday, *The Macau Post Daily's* editing and reporting teams will be off on Sunday, returning to work on Monday May 25 so the print edition of your favourite newspaper will be on the newsstands and delivered to your homes and offices on the morning of Tuesday May 26.

However, our website <https://www.macaupostdaily.com/> will be updated with breaking news round-the-clock.

We wish all our readers, advertisers, distributors and contributors a restful break.

All government offices and banks will be closed on Monday returning to work on Tuesday May 26

'Legacy of Time' exhibition revisits Macau's firecracker industry at MUST

Khalel Vallo

An exhibition exploring Macau's firecracker industry through historical archives and packaging labels is being held at the private Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST) in Cotai, showcasing the cultural and industrial legacy of one of the city's former economic pillars.

The "Legacy of Time: An Exhibition of Historical Documents on Macau's Firecracker Industry" opened at the Arts and Culture Gallery on the third floor of MUST's Library Building last month and runs until August 31. The exhibition is jointly organised by the MUST Library, the Faculty of Humanities and Arts of MUST, and integrated resort operator Sands China as part of the university's 26th anniversary celebrations.

The exhibition is divided into two sections – "Fireworks in the Archives" and "Splendor in Miniature" – featuring around 100 archival business documents and 500 firework packaging labels from across Guangdong Province and Macau.

Speaking to the *Post*, local artist Guilherme Ung Vai Meng described the showcase as an extension of the ongoing "A Century of Iec Long Firecracker Factory in Radiance" exhibition at Sands Gallery in Cotai.

"At Sands Gallery, we focus on the Macau firecracker industry because Iec Long Firecracker Factory was established in 1925, so this year marks its 101st anniversary", Ung said. "Here, we extend the exhibition beyond Macau to the wider Guangdong area because



Local artist Guilherme Ung Vai Meng shows an exhibit in a display cabinet to visitors during yesterday's "Legacy of Time: An Exhibition of Historical Documents on Macau's Firecracker Industry" at the Arts and Culture Gallery on the third floor of the private Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST)'s Library Building in Cotai. – Photo: Khalel Vallo

Macau was not an isolated place producing firecrackers. It was one of the important cities connected to the industry", he added.

Ung said the exhibition aims to demonstrate both the similarities and differences between Macau and neighbouring cities through the labels' designs and languages. "For example, Macau factory labels sometimes include Portuguese, which is impossible to see in other cities", he said. Despite their small

size, Ung described the labels as "a bridge between different cultures", noting they connected Macau's products to countries such as the United States, South Africa, and the Philippines.

Ung said the organisers hope to bring the exhibition to more cities in the future, adding that museums in the Chinese mainland have already expressed interest after seeing the current displays.

Stay tuned for an upcoming page 4 about the topic. ■

Govt still studying senior canteen plan for Seac Pai Van

Continued from p.1

During the legislature's plenary session in March, Hon said that a meal was expected to cost 35 patacas on average, and due to a 15-pataca government subsidy, each beneficiary was expected to pay 20 patacas per meal.

However, the government said late last month that it had decided not to roll out the programme in the near future as it was still gathering opinions from different segments of civil society including the restaurant sector. More specifically, during a "tea-break" meeting held by the government late last month to gather opinions from residents concerning various topics, Hon said that since the government first revealed the programme in late March, the government had received feedback from various segments of civil society, including concerns raised by restaurants in the Seac Pai Van community about the possible adverse impact on their operations.

Hon said late last month that the government was planning to switch the programme to one aiming to encourage restaurants "in the market" to offer healthy menus for senior citizens in the community, adding that his bureau was in talks with the Health Bureau (SSM), Seac Pai Van restaurants, and catering business associations on the matter.

When asked by reporters yesterday about the senior canteen initiative's latest updates, Hon underlined that the government is vigorously listening to opinions from the segments concerned including the restaurant sector. He underlined that the ultimate goal was to encourage the catering sector to offer meal options that meet the health needs of older people, which was also an important part of the silver economy.

Hon said that his bureau was collaborating with the Macao University of Tourism (UTM), the Health Bureau, and chef associations to establish healthy catering standards for seniors, with the aim of developing nutritious and tasty meals suitable for them.

When asked yesterday whether the government was still planning to stick to the 20-pataca-per-meal proposal, Hon said that the government was now "open to different possibilities, not restricted to any one particular model, as we are now reconsidering the proposal". ■

IC sets up Macao Pavilion at Shenzhen int'l cultural industries fair

Rui Pastorin

The 22nd China (Shenzhen) International Cultural Industries Fair (ICIF) is being held at the Shenzhen World Exhibition & Convention Center through Monday, with the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) setting up a "Macao Pavilion" at the ongoing event.

An opening ceremony was held for the pavilion yesterday, with Wan Sucheng, director of the Department of Publicity, Cultural and Sports Affairs of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Macao Special

Administrative Region (MSAR); and IC President Deland Leong Wai Man among the officiating guests, according to an IC statement last night.

The pavilion, themed "Cultural Macao" and spanning around 300 square metres, is located within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Cultural Industries Innovation Exhibition Hall, the statement noted.

Among the pavilion's features are "an introduction to the 'Historic Centre of Macao Route', promotion of Macau's major cultural events and

branded activities, and the display and sale of distinctive cultural and creative products incorporating elements of Macau's World Heritage and intangible cultural heritage", according to the statement.

Also showcased is the "Old Macao" installation enabling visitors to take instant photos with a selection of Macau historic scene backgrounds, while demonstrations and performances of Macau's intangible cultural heritage projects are also presented at the pavilion, the statement noted. ■



This photo provided by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) last night shows an overhead view of the 22nd China (Shenzhen) International Cultural Industries Fair (ICIF).

Sands Macao celebrates 22nd anniversary, presents special lunch boxes to cabbies

Rui Pastorin

Integrated resort operator Sands Macao celebrated its 22nd anniversary on Monday and continued its long-standing community tradition of presenting special lunch boxes to local taxi drivers.

The tradition has been held since Sands Macao opened in 2004, annually providing local drivers with special lunches as part of its anniversary celebration, Sands China said in a statement that day. The tradition shows appreciation for the cabbies' "enduring contributions to Macau's tourism industry", the statement added.

The event, which took place midday that day,

had Sands China Ltd. Senior Vice President of International Marketing Thomas Pang (彭立基) and other management staff greeting taxi drivers at the hotel's main entrance and presenting each driver with the special anniversary lunch box with a "thoroughly curated menu" designed to convey gratitude and appreciation to the taxi drivers, the statement said.

"As Sands Macao enters its 22nd year, Sands China looks forward to continuing to work hand in hand with its team members and the wider community – upholding the spirit of cooperation and shared prosperity to jointly contribute to Macau's development as a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure", the statement pointed out.



This photo taken and provided by Sands China on Monday shows Sands China Senior Vice President of International Marketing Thomas Pang presenting one of the special lunch boxes to a local taxi driver at Sands Macao.

Lisboeta Macau hosts 'Do it Again! H853 K-WAVE Fanfest', draws fans & dancers

Rui Pastorin

The "Do it Again! H853 K-WAVE Fanfest" was recently held at The H853 Fun Factory, with the event drawing many visitors and K-Pop fans for themed activities.

According to a recent Lisboeta Macau statement, the event, supported by the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO), featured the 220-minute "K-Pop Random Dance" event and fan activities, while photo spots were also available. The statement said that the event had K-Pop at its core through dance, music and fan culture.

Attending the fanfest were also dancers from the Greater Bay Area (GBA) to showcase choreography and performances during the one-on-one "K-Pop Music Battle", according to the statement, while performances were also delivered by local dancers across the mall during the "K-Pop Random Dance" portion of the event, which drew many K-POP fans and young participants.



This photo recently provided by Lisboeta Macau shows the "Do it Again! H853 K-WAVE Fanfest" taking place at the H853 Fun Factory in Cotai.



This image downloaded from THE KARL LAGERFELD website shows female mixologists Jennifer Ho (from left to right), Carrie Chen, and Ring Zhao, who are from Hong Kong, Macau and Shenzhen respectively, for SJM's two-night "GET ON STAGE" at MESA Bar.

SJM's 'GET ON STAGE' to spotlight female GBA bartenders next week

Rui Pastorin

SJM Resorts' "GET ON STAGE" series will next week feature three leading mixologists from the Greater Bay Area (GBA) at the MESA Bar in THE KARL LAGERFELD MACAU in Cotai.

The integrated resort operator said in a statement on Wednesday that the event, slated for May 29 to 30 from 9:30 p.m. to 12:30 a.m., will feature MESA Bar Senior Mixologist Carrie Chen (陳楷儀), who is from Macau. She is the first runner-up of the Hennessy My Way Hong Kong & Macau 2025 and the China Champion of the 2024 Nordes Gin Competition, using her hometown's "diverse cultural background" as creative inspiration.

Jennifer Ho (何京臻) from Hong Kong is the Head Mixologist at Alibi - Wine Dine Be Social, and is the Hennessy My Way Hong Kong & Macau

2025 Champion, the statement said. The statement added that she has "a particular talent for identifying subtle connections between ingredients", standing out in various international mixology competitions.

Shenzhen's Ring Zhao, meanwhile, is the founder of Bar Choice and the China Champion of the 8th BACARDÍ Legacy Cocktail Competition and a Global Top 9 finalist of the Hennessy My Way 2021. The statement noted that she is "dedicated to connecting China's intangible cultural heritage of tea art with modern bar culture".

The women will "highlight the artistry of cognac using premium brandy from the House of Hennessy" and bring their creative visions to cognac, the statement said.

The statement said that special cocktails and mocktails are priced at 148 patacas, while a package is also available for 388 patacas.

Galaxy Macau to host fan events for UFC FIGHT NIGHT

Rui Pastorin

Fan experiences and activities are set to take place at Galaxy Macau during the fight week of the upcoming "UFC FIGHT NIGHT", which is slated to take place from May 28 to 30 at Galaxy Arena, Macau's largest, state-of-the-art indoor arena.

According to a statement from the integrated resort operator, an opening ceremony for the Fight Week 2026 will take place at Galaxy Macau's East Square on Wednesday, where Open Workouts will feature headliners Song Yadong and Deiveson Figueiredo; co-main eventers Zhang Mingyang and Alonzo Menifield; and fighters Kai Asakura and Xiong Jingnan.

On Friday, UFC flyweight champion Valentina Shevchenko, UFC #5 featherweight Yair Rodriguez, and fan favourite veteran "the Leech" Li Jingliang will join a meet-and-greet at 4 p.m. at East Square, the statement added.

Autograph sessions featuring with UFC guest athletes Shevchenko, Rodriguez, and former two-time UFC strawweight champion Zhang Weili are meanwhile set for noon in the same square on Saturday, May 30, the statement said.

Moreover, the Pearl Lobby at Galaxy Promenade will also be turned into the "UFC FAN EXPERIENCE" featuring the sport's octagon-themed installation. Among the experiences to be had are AI-integrated activations putting fans in UFC posters, virtual weigh-in poses, and friend-versus-friend face-offs; along with fitness challenges such as vertical jumps and reaction-time drills.

Specially-created UFC Merchandise will also be available in the area.

The statement added that themed retail and dining experiences will also be presented during and ahead of the event. For more information, visit www.galaxymacau.com.



This photo provided by Galaxy Macau on Wednesday shows an activity during last year's UFC FAN EXPERIENCE event at the integrated resort.

Historic Macau tea culture takes on modern flavours

Analysis

Macau's Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) recently held the "International Tea Day Carnival 2026", aiming to bring tea culture to the community.

Held at the Macau Tea Culture House and Lou Lim Ioc Garden, the event featured games, workshops, and educational sessions.

Historically, Macau played a key role along the Maritime Silk Road, serving as a hub for tea exports to global markets. An IAM staff member told Xinhua that the event highlighted Macau's heritage in the tea trade and its ongoing cultural significance.

Modern tea businesses are tapping into Macau's vibrant tourism market. A leading mainland tea chain opened its first store in Macau earlier this month. Rex He, general manager of the chain's Hong Kong and Macau branch, expressed willingness to introduce consumers to the charm of Eastern tea culture.

He noted that Macau's mix of resident interest and tourist demand creates

favourable conditions for the modern tea beverage market.

Traditional teahouses are also innovating. Lou Seak Lon, inheritor of the long-standing Ieng Kei Cha, said their lychee black tea has become popular with visitors and is gradually establishing a distinctive Macau identity.

Lou said that young consumers enjoy new-style drinks, noting that collaboration with local chain tea brands has helped expand sales while preserving cultural authenticity. "Traditional stores want to focus on quality and heritage, attracting loyal customers," he added.

Lei Iam Leong, president of the Macau Catering Industry Association, said the operational advantages of chain tea brands, such as online ordering and unified supply chains, can help local businesses upgrade their services.

"Tourists may be drawn by chain brands into commercial areas and then explore Macau's traditional stores and community culture," he added.

— Xinhua, MPD

Macau to licence 'day hospitals' from Dec 1



This file photo taken last year shows the inpatient building of the private Kiang Wu Hospital, which has long been providing comprehensive medical services comprising emergency, intensive care, outpatient, and specialty medical. — Photo: Tony Wong

Tony Wong

The Legislative Assembly (AL) has passed a government-initiated bill establishing the licensing of a new type of private medical institution known as "day hospital" whose service level ranges between a hospital and a clinic.

Day hospitals are a new type of medical institution becoming increasingly popular elsewhere, providing certain medical services that previously could only be provided by hospitals. As its name suggests, day hospitals do not run inpatient services.

The bill passed by the local legislature will take effect on December 1.

Currently, Macau's medical institutions in the private sector only comprise hospitals and clinics. According to the new law, the future day hospitals can provide less intensive, outpatient surgical procedures and other specialty medical services, which currently can only be provided by hospitals.

After the new law takes effect, the current private hospitals in the city can continue to operate as hospitals, or they will be required to switch to day hospitals, depending on whether their equipment and facilities can meet the new requirements.

The bill's outline was passed during a plenary session of the legislature in November last year, after which the bill was reviewed by its 1st Standing Committee, before it was resubmitted to a plenary session on Tuesday, which Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Wallis O Lam attended, when it was voted on article-by-article in its second and final reading.

The Macau Health Bureau's (SSM) licensing of privately run medical institutions in Macau is currently regulated by two decree laws promulgated in the 1990s, respectively regulating hospitals and clinics, when Macau was still under temporary Portuguese administration.

The new law will establish a new legal system for licensing and regulating medical institutions in the private sector, replacing the two current decree laws. Under the new licensing system, Macau's medical institutions in the private sector will comprise three categories — hospitals, day hospitals, and clinics.

According to the new law, day hospitals can provide certain non-hospitalised specialty medical services approved by the Health Bureau, which currently can only be provided by hospitals. The new law defines day hospitals as private medical institutions without inpatient facilities that provide certain specialty medical services with the expected length of diagnosis and treatment lasting up to 12 hours, except special circumstances.

Future hospitals must have emergency department, ICU

The new law regulating private medical institutions defines hospitals as private institutions with inpatient facilities providing comprehensive medical services, comprising emergency services, intensive care, outpatient services, and specialty medical services.

According to the new law, day hospitals will be barred from running inpatient services. The law defines day hospitals as private institutions providing outpatient services and certain specialty medical services approved by the Health Bureau.

Clinics are defined as private institutions providing outpatient services and certain other medical services green-lighted by the Health Bureau. The new law explicitly bars clinics from providing medical services that can only be provided by hospitals or day hospitals.

After the new law takes effect, a hospital must be equipped with inpatient facilities, an emergency department, an intensive care unit (ICU), operating rooms, and a pharmacy. A hospital can also choose to run a traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) pharmacy if it provides TCM services.

According to the new law, a day hospital will not have an emergency department and an ICU, but it must be equipped with a Western medicine pharmacy or a TCM pharmacy depending on the medical services that it provides.

2-year transition period

The new law provides for a two-year transition period after it takes effect, during which current private hospitals can continue to operate in line with the current decree law promulgated in the 1990s, after which they will have to meet the requirements listed by the new law in order to continue operating as hospitals, namely by setting up an emergency department and an ICU if they currently do not have them. During the two-year period, they will have to apply for a hospital licence to be issued in line with the new law's requirements.

Current private hospitals can instead choose to apply for a day hospital licence if they decide not to upgrade their facilities in order to meet the new law's requirements for a hospital.

If a current private hospital without an emergency department and an ICU has been operating for over five years by the time it files an application for a new licence, it can choose to set up a 24/7 outpatient department instead of setting up an emergency department and an ICU, in which case the government will also issue them a hospital licence. ■



Visitors look at a flying vehicle from Changan Automobile during the Eighth Western China International Fair for Investment and Trade in Chongqing Municipality yesterday. The fair opened yesterday, when it recorded the signing of 212 contracts totaling over 150 billion yuan. Themed "New Western China, New Manufacturing, New Services," the fair, running until May 24, features nearly 40 symposiums, along with investment and trade matchmaking events and consumption promotion activities. Covering a total exhibition area of 150,000 square meters, this year's fair has attracted nearly 1,400 enterprises from 50 countries and regions. Britain serves as the guest country of honor. The fair also released a catalog -- the Invest in Chongqing List of Opportunities -- for the first time. — Xinhua

HK well-positioned to establish financing pathways for hydrogen industry: official

HONG KONG — As an international financial center, Hong Kong can establish smooth financing channels for green capital and the hydrogen industry, and help build a global hub for hydrogen exchanges and cooperation, a senior official with the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government said.

With the unique advantage of connecting the Chinese mainland with the world, Hong Kong is set to play a role in regulatory alignment by establishing standards and certification systems to connect domestic and international markets, Poon Kwok-ying, director of the Electrical and Mechanical Services of the HKSAR government, said while speaking at the International Hydrogen Development Symposium here.

Also speaking at the symposium, Alpha Lau, director-general of Investment Promotion of Invest Hong Kong (InvestHK), highlighted that the city's hydrogen ecosystem is gaining real traction.

Over the past three years, InvestHK has successfully attracted several leading hydrogen energy firms to establish a presence in Hong Kong, Lau said, noting that a number of these firms have already been listed in Hong Kong, with funds raised totaling over HK\$2.5 billion.

The symposium is part of the ongoing Hydrogen Week in Hong Kong. During the week, a series of diversified programs are being held, including thematic forums, an industry exhibition and public education, fully demonstrating Hong Kong's distinctive role and position in aligning with the national hydrogen strategy.

China has made significant strides in advancing policies for hydrogen development in recent years. In March 2022, Chinese authorities released a plan on the development of hydrogen energy for the 2021-2035 period, outlining the establishment of a hydrogen supply system and application promotion goals. — Xinhua

Pakistani PM to visit China

BEIJING – At the invitation of Premier Li Qiang, Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif will pay an official visit to China from tomorrow to Tuesday, a foreign ministry spokesperson announced yesterday.

Spokesperson Guo Jiakun said at a regular press briefing that Sharif's visit is an important high-level exchange between China and Pakistan on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of their diplomatic relations.

Guo said that during the visit, President Xi Jinping will meet with Sharif and Premier Li Qiang will hold talks with him.

The leaders of the two countries will have an in-depth exchange of views on bilateral ties and issues of

common concern, pointing out the direction for the development of China-Pakistan relations under the new situation, the spokesperson said.

Sharif will also attend the reception celebrating the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Pakistan and visit Zhejiang Province, Guo added.

Noting that China and Pakistan are good friends and all-weather strategic cooperative partners, Guo said that over the past 75 years, China-Pakistan relations have stood all tests and remained rock-solid, setting a fine example for state-to-state relations.

Guo added that in recent years, under the strategic guidance of leaders of the two countries, the

two sides have maintained close high-level exchanges and steadily advanced practical cooperation, yielding fruitful outcomes in the high-quality development of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

China and Pakistan have kept close communication and coordination on major international and regional issues, effectively safeguarded their common interests, and promoted regional peace, stability and development, Guo said.

China looks forward to both sides taking this visit as an opportunity to carry forward traditional friendship, deepen all-round cooperation and jointly write a new chapter in building a closer China-Pakistan community with a shared future in the new era, Guo added. – Xinhua



Engineers adjust a humanoid robot at tech firm SYNROX at 764 Aerospace in Tianjin Municipality on Wednesday. Located on the site of a former state-owned broadcasting equipment factory, 764 Aerospace, a digital industrial park in Hexi District of Tianjin, is home to more than 10 high-tech enterprises. Featuring embodied intelligence data collection, robot debugging, algorithm R&D and scenario implementation, and has built a full-chain industrial cluster covering the whole process from data collection to scenario deployment. – Xinhua

China to resolutely counteract should EU impose discriminatory, restrictive measures: MOC

BEIJING – China will resolutely respond with countermeasures should the European Union (EU) insist on unveiling a so-called new instrument and imposing discriminatory and restrictive measures against Chinese companies or products, the Ministry of Commerce (MOC) said yesterday.

Ministry spokesperson He Yadong made the remarks at a press briefing in response to media reports

that the European Commission is expediting the development of a new trade tool to address so-called China's "overcapacity" issue.

If a trade surplus is labeled as "overcapacity," then would European exports such as automobiles, pharmaceuticals, wine, and cosmetics also be considered as "overcapacity?" He asked.

The spokesperson added that

some countries are investigating the EU's "overcapacity" issues, and under such a circumstance, the EU should not adopt double standards.

"We urge the European side to face reality, return to the right track of dialogue and consultation, and take actions that truly benefit the development of China-EU economic and trade relations," He said.

– Xinhua

Starbucks teams up with Chinese university to boost coffee industry

KUNMING – A university in Yunnan Province, a renowned coffee production base in southwest China, has partnered with Starbucks to nurture homegrown talent for the booming industry.

Yunnan Agricultural University signed a cooperation agreement with Starbucks China on Wednesday to integrate academic research and industrial resources. Under the deal, the university will leverage its expertise in technological innovation and industrial services, while Starbucks China will offer internship opportunities and career guidance for relevant majors.

The two sides will focus on talent training and research

collaboration and help elevate the international competitiveness of the Yunnan coffee industry.

Rolling out China's first undergraduate program in coffee science and engineering in 2024, the university boasts solid research capabilities in coffee variety breeding and cultivation technology.

Wang Weibin, Communist Party of China (CPC) chief of the university, said the partnership is expected to set a fine example for college-enterprise cooperation and shore up the sound development of China's coffee industry.

Starbucks China stated that the partnership marks a key step in deepening its presence in Yunnan

and empowering the local coffee industry.

As China's core coffee production base, Yunnan has witnessed robust growth of the coffee industry. Official data shows that the province had coffee plantations covering around 97,500 hectares with a green bean output of 138,900 tonnes in 2025, leading the country in planting scale, output and industrial value.

Customs statistics indicate that Yunnan exported 19,000 tonnes of coffee beans and finished coffee products worth 860 million yuan last year, which were sold to 43 countries and regions, such as the Netherlands, Vietnam, and Germany. – Xinhua

China ranks as Germany's top source of investment projects in 2025

BERLIN – Chinese companies became the largest source of foreign investment projects in Germany last year, overtaking the United States for the first time since 2017, an official report showed yesterday.

Chinese firms launched 228 investment projects in Germany in 2025, up 14.6 percent from the previous year, according to the annual report by federal agency Germany Trade & Invest (GTAI).

US companies, by contrast, accounted for 206 projects, down 10 percent year-on-year. Meanwhile, Switzerland ranked third, with 174 projects after a 13.9-percent decline.

The report tracks greenfield investments and expansion projects but excludes mergers and acquisitions.

The number of foreign investment projects in Germany fell 9.3 percent overall to 1,564 in 2025, reflecting what GTAI described as a challenging global investment environment. The agency noted that Germany remained relatively resilient compared with its European Union peers, where foreign investment

projects declined by around 18 percent across the bloc.

Chinese investors showed the strongest interest in electronics and automation, transport and logistics, energy, and digitalization, the report said.

More than one in five Chinese investment projects involved production and research-and-development activities, above the overall average for foreign investment projects in Germany.

This is a sign that Chinese firms are deepening their integration into the local industrial base, according to GTAI.

Thomas Bozoyan, a GTAI expert and the report's author, said Chinese companies were continuously expanding their footprint in Germany, in particular across industrial applications, cutting-edge and future technologies, as well as knowledge-intensive services.

"This not only underlines Germany's long-term attractiveness for Chinese investors, but also reflects the accelerating international expansion and global ambitions of Chinese companies," he said.

– Xinhua

China-Africa ties boost continent's modernization, talent growth: expert

HARARE – China's relationship with Africa has widened the continent's development options and helped transfer knowledge to many African countries through people-to-people engagements, Zimbabwean economic analyst and political commentator Dereck Goto said yesterday.

Responding to questions from Xinhua ahead of Africa Day, which falls on May 25 every year, Goto pointed out that China has introduced a development model that has assisted in the continent's economic transformation.

"China's role in Africa is often discussed through the lens of infrastructure, trade and finance. Those are important, but they are also the most obvious dimensions. The deeper story is that China is increasingly influencing how Africa thinks about development itself," Goto said.

He noted that for decades, Africa's engagement with the international system was largely shaped by a donor-recipient framework.

"China introduced a different proposition: development through production, infrastructure, industrialization and state-led long-term planning," he said. "It has expanded Africa's menu of developmental options."

According to Goto, the first major contribution from China to Africa is economic transformation, where investments in roads, railways, power generation, industrial parks and digital infrastructure are not merely construction projects.

"They are attempts to lower the cost of doing business across

Africa and create the conditions necessary for industrial growth," he said.

Turning to the broader cooperation framework, China and the African Union (AU) launched the China-Africa Year of People-to-People Exchanges in January 2026 at the AU Headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, aiming to pursue the shared dream of modernization.

The two sides will host a series of activities to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and African countries, with the aim of promoting mutual learning among civilizations and strengthening people-to-people bonds, amity and cooperation.

In this regard, Goto emphasized that China's second, often overlooked, contribution is knowledge transfer through people-to-people exchanges.

"The most valuable export China may ultimately provide is not capital, but developmental knowledge. This is where the China-Africa Year of People-to-People Exchanges becomes particularly significant," he said.

Calling for a bidirectional approach to cultural exchanges that fosters mutual understanding and reduces stereotypes, Goto said the relationship represents a new chapter in Global South cooperation.

"China and Africa increasingly frame their engagement around shared development challenges, economic modernization and national rejuvenation," he said.

– Xinhua

Xi, Pakistani president exchange congratulations on 75th anniversary of diplomatic ties

BEIJING – President Xi Jinping and Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari yesterday exchanged congratulatory messages on the 75th anniversary of diplomatic ties between the two countries.

Xi said that China and Pakistan are good friends and all-weather strategic cooperative partners linked by mountains and rivers and sharing weal and woe.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations 75 years ago, no matter how the international situation has changed, the friendship between China and Pakistan has always remained rock-solid and unbreakable, he said.

The two countries have maintained high-level mutual political trust, practical cooperation, security cooperation and

international collaboration for a long time, setting a model for state-to-state relations, Xi added.

Xi said he attaches great importance to developing China-Pakistan relations and is willing to work with Zardari to take the anniversary as an opportunity to enhance strategic communication, carry forward traditional friendship, deepen all-round cooperation, and accelerate the building of an even closer China-Pakistan community with a shared future in the new era, so that China-Pakistan relations can better benefit the two peoples and contribute to regional peace and development.

For his part, Zardari said the Pakistan-China all-weather strategic cooperative partnership has stood the test of time and

become a steadfast pillar for regional peace, stability and development.

The Pakistani side highly commends the global initiatives proposed by Xi, which carry far-reaching significance, and values Xi's firm commitment to deepening Pakistan-China relations and promoting the building of an even closer Pakistan-China community with a shared future in the new era, he said.

Pakistan sincerely appreciates China's steadfast support for Pakistan in safeguarding its sovereignty and territorial integrity and promoting its economic and social development, said Zardari, adding that his country will continue to support China on issues concerning its core interests and further elevate the Pakistan-China friendship to new levels.

On the same day, Premier Li Qiang and Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also exchanged congratulatory messages.

China stands ready to work with Pakistan to strengthen solidarity and coordination, actively build the upgraded Version 2.0 of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and continuously advance the all-weather strategic cooperative partnership between the two countries, said Li.

For his part, Sharif noted that Pakistan-China relations are grounded on mutual trust, sovereign equality and the joint pursuit of peace and development. He said the Pakistani side remains firmly committed to promoting the high-quality development of the CPEC and exploring more areas of Pakistan-China cooperation. – Xinhua



James Murphy, a descendant of a former British prisoner of war (POW) aboard the Lisbon Maru, lays wreath in front of the monument for Dongji fishermen's rescue of British POWs, on Dongji Island in Zhoushan, Zhejiang Province, on Tuesday. Twenty descendants of British POWs aboard the Lisbon Maru gathered in Zhoushan on Tuesday and Wednesday for a commemorative ceremony honoring a remarkable act of courage. After the flowers were laid, relatives of British soldiers and local fishermen's descendants took up shovels. Together, they planted a boxwood sapling, a gesture intended to symbolize a friendship that has outlived war and distance. In October 1942, the Lisbon Maru, a cargo vessel requisitioned by the Japanese army to transport more than 1,800 British POWs from Hong Kong to Japan, was torpedoed off the Zhoushan Islands by a US submarine after failing to display mandated POW transport markings. Local Chinese fishermen, despite Japanese soldiers firing into the water, made 65 trips in 46 small wooden sampans to rescue 384 British POWs from the sinking ship. – Xinhua

China, Pakistan celebrate 75th anniversary of diplomatic ties, vow to deepen all-round cooperation

ISLAMABAD – China and Pakistan have vowed to deepen all-round cooperation and elevate the bilateral ties to a new higher level.

The promise came as Cai Dafeng, vice chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC), led a delegation to visit Pakistan from May 20 to 22 at the invitation of the National Assembly of Pakistan.

During his stay, Cai met with Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq and Senate Chairman Yusuf Raza Gilani, and attended the commemorative activities marking the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Pakistan with the four Pakistani leaders.

Cai stated that since the establishment of diplomatic relations 75 years ago, the two countries have firmly remained true to their original aspirations and supported each other. Under the strategic guidance

of the leaders of both countries, the all-weather strategic cooperative partnership between China and Pakistan has become a model of state-to-state relations, leading the way in building a community with a shared future for mankind.

China is willing to strengthen comprehensive cooperation with Pakistan, deepen exchanges between legislative bodies, and accelerate the construction of a closer China-Pakistan community with a shared future in the new era, Cai said.

Noting the friendship between Pakistan and China is higher than mountains, deeper than oceans, and sweeter than honey, the Pakistani side said Pakistan is grateful for China's valuable support.

Pakistan will adhere to the one-China principle, deepen exchanges and cooperation, fully protect the safety of Chinese personnel, projects, and institutions in Pakistan, and promote Pakistan-China relations to a new level, the Pakistani side added. – Xinhua

Xi-Putin meeting charts new strategic course for China-Russia ties

Commentary

BEIJING – The high-profile meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin in Beijing on Wednesday set the course for the next stage of bilateral relations and underscored the two major countries' commitment to advancing global governance reform in the right direction.

Their in-depth, friendly and fruitful talks, lasting more than three hours in total, reinforced a shared commitment to advancing the long-term, sound, steady and high-quality development of China-Russia ties, a strategic choice grounded in the fundamental interests of both countries and in line with broader global trends.

Putin's state visit to China coincided with two milestones in bilateral ties: the 30th anniversary of the China-Russia strategic partnership of coordination and the 25th anniversary of the China-Russia Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation. The two presidents agreed to further extend the treaty, underscoring the long-term nature of the friendship.

The bilateral relationship now stands at the highest level in history. The steering role of the two heads of state is the fundamental guarantee for the steady and long-term development of China-Russia relations. Having had more than 40 meetings over the years, Xi and Putin have built deep mutual trust and a strong personal friendship, providing continuity and strategic guidance for bilateral ties.

Their meeting on Wednesday sent a reassuring message to the international community that China and Russia are further strengthening the foundation of their political mutual trust, the most prominent feature of the bilateral ties.

Pragmatic cooperation is a key driver of the stable growth of China-Russia relations. To promote the high-quality development of bilateral

relations, it is imperative to further deepen such cooperation across all sectors. During Putin's visit, a slew of cooperation documents were signed. Cooperation in the fields of economy and trade, investment, energy and resources, transportation, and scientific and technological innovation is expected to be upgraded.

China and Russia are also expected to strengthen exchanges and cooperation in education, culture, film, tourism, sports and other fields, and ensure that the everlasting friendship between the two countries takes deeper root in the hearts of the people.

Beyond benefiting the peoples of both countries, a stable China-Russia relationship contributes to human progress. Far from being tranquil, the world faces threats from unilateralism and hegemonism, and the risks of slipping back into the law of the jungle. Both as permanent members of the UN Security Council, China and Russia bear special responsibilities for safeguarding global peace and development.

To advance the development of a more just and equitable global governance system, the two countries have pledged to strengthen coordination and collaboration within multilateral frameworks, including the United Nations, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, BRICS and APEC, unite the Global South, and steer global governance reform in the right direction.

No matter how the international landscape evolves, China and Russia will for sure move forward with composure under the strategic guidance of their leaders, and leverage the stability of their relations to tackle various challenges facing the world today.

Looking ahead, the two countries will fully seize historic opportunities, maintain the steady and long-term growth of bilateral relations, and open a new chapter in cooperation. – Xinhua

China voices firm support for Cuba in safeguarding sovereignty, opposing interference

BEIJING – China firmly supports Cuba in safeguarding its sovereignty and national dignity and opposing external interference, a foreign ministry spokesperson said yesterday.

Spokesperson Guo Jiakun made the remarks at a daily press briefing in response to a query about the US recent accusation against Cuban leader Raúl Castro, which the Cuban government has strongly rejected.

Guo said China always firmly opposes

unilateral sanctions that have no basis in international law or authorization of the United Nations Security Council.

"We stand against abusing judicial means and exerting pressure on Cuba under any pretext by external forces," said Guo.

"The United States should stop brandishing sanctions or judicial proceedings at Cuba and stop resorting to the threat of force at every turn," he added. (More on p.12) – Xinhua

Tourists in Thailand plan for coming cuts to visa-free stays

Watsamon Tri-Yasakda and Sebastien Duval

BANGKOK – The backpackers on Khao San Road, a Bangkok thoroughfare famous for its wild nightlife, are waking up this week with an extra headache: the Thai government is set to shorten the length of visa-free stays.

Near the capital's Tha Tian pier, where tourists catch ferries to the landmark Wat Arun, Irishman Alex Brady said the forthcoming one-month limit would have affected his plans a lot – because he and his friends “initially came here with no plan at all”.

Brady and his travel companions were visiting for about five weeks, and the flexibility of the current 60-day visa-free scheme allowed them to see more of Thailand at their leisure, the 24-year-old said.

The new limits – announced Tuesday for tourists from more than 90 countries in a bid to curb crime – would “really restrict you in what you can see”, said Brady.

After Bangkok, he and his group planned to get a bus and ferry to the diving hotspot of Koh Tao for about a week before travelling north to the mountains of Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai.

“If you're paying for an expensive flight ticket out here, you want to spend a good amount of time out here,” said Brady, a digital engineer.

Tourism accounts for more than 10 percent of Thailand's GDP, but foreign arrivals are yet to return to their pre-pandemic highs.

The 60-day visa-free stay was introduced two years ago to encourage more visitors and for them to stay longer.

But a recent series of high-profile arrests of foreigners, including cases linked to drug offences, sex in public and foreigners operating businesses such as hotels and schools without proper permits, has sparked public backlash.



Visitors follow a tour guide inside the Grand Palace in Bangkok on Wednesday. Thailand is drastically cutting the length of visa-free stays for tourists from more than 90 countries in an effort to curb crime involving foreign nationals. – AFP

Now officials say they will limit how long visitors can stay on a country-by-country basis to try to prevent foreigners committing crimes.

Extended stays

Exactly how the new policy's reduced timing will prevent visa overstayers, public indecency and illegal businesses has not been disclosed, nor when the fresh rules will go into effect.

Tourists will still be able to renew 30-day visas once for an additional 30 days – at the discretion of an immigration officer – before needing to leave the country, officials said.

Visitors can make one “visa run” a year and stay for up to another 60 days, but would then need to leave again and could only return on a different visa status, such as a work, education or retirement visa.

Another traveller, Elin Ovrebø, director of a US university study abroad programme, said she has brought students to Thailand for 28-day trips almost every year for more than a decade – and she likes to stay a week longer herself.

While the policy change may

mean she would not do that in the future, “it won't stop me from coming”, she said.

Visa runs

Sitting on a stool outside a Bangkok shopping mall, Anna Heindrich waited for a minibus for a lightning round trip to Laos to re-enter Thailand on a new stay.

At 80, the German does not fit the typical customer profile for services provided by the Bangkok Buddy agency, which charges 5,500 baht (US\$170) per client – mostly younger backpackers.

But Heindrich has been in Thailand for three months and wants to stay two weeks longer.

“I spoke with the agency and it sounded easy on paper. Not necessarily very comfortable, but easy,” she told AFP before setting off on a nearly 16-hour round trip.

Bangkok Buddy manager Tanya Chansuwan said the new visa rules could help her business, but may also complicate travel plans for tourists.

“It will be tougher for the clients, and some might choose to go somewhere else,” she said.

“Vietnam, because it's cheaper.” – AFP

Philippines orders arrest of fugitive senator sought by ICC

MANILA – The Philippine government yesterday ordered police to arrest a senator wanted by the International Criminal Court over his role in ex-president Rodrigo Duterte's deadly drug crackdown.

Senator Ronald “Bato” Dela Rosa, who served as the nation's police chief, was the enforcer of the drug war that killed thousands of people in the Philippines.

Dela Rosa is on the run after fleeing the Senate building last week, hours after a shooting incident between government agents and senate security personnel.

“I would like to confirm that the Philippine law enforcement agencies... are now tasked to effect the arrest of Senator Ronald ‘Bato’ dela Rosa,” Justice Secretary Frederick Vida told reporters.

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.

After a dramatic chase up the senate stairs on the same day, government agents who failed to arrest him later paused the effort as the senate leadership gave him sanctuary.

The Philippine Supreme Court's interim ruling on Wednesday denying the Philippine ex-police chief's bid for a temporary restraining order means the ICC warrant can now be enforced, Vida added.

“We're pursuing this so that the ends of justice may be achieved,” Vida added, warning that “there are consequences” to anyone who would try to help Dela Rosa avoid arrest.

His lawyer said Wednesday

he will appeal the Supreme Court ruling.

Former president 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 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.

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

Thai police arrest 11 in scam-linked weapons cache probe

BANGKOK – Thai authorities have arrested 11 more suspects in a widening investigation of a Chinese man charged this month with possessing military-grade weapons and links to cyberscam networks, police said yesterday.

Sun Mingchen was arrested around two weeks ago after police discovered a massive arsenal – including assault rifles, explosives and grenades – at his home in the beach resort city of Pattaya.

Police initially investigated whether the cache was linked to terrorism but later ruled that out, saying the weapons were tied to scam operations based in neighbouring Cambodia.

Police said yesterday they had arrested 11 more suspects linked to a network that had defrauded victims of around US\$25 million.

“All recovered evidence clearly links Sun Mingchen to a Cambodia-based cyberscam syndicate operated by a network under Lan Tian, also known as ‘Xiao Lan’,” according to a police statement.

Those detained included Sun himself, who faces additional

weapons possession charges, and a Taiwanese woman believed to have worked with him and held under the same charges.

Thai nationals were also arrested, including suspects accused of supplying weapons to Sun, and three Thai officials accused of forging documents used to establish a front business for him, police said.

Police also uncovered financial transactions linked to Sun and online scam operations that allegedly targeted victims through more than 600 bank accounts, causing estimated losses of more than 815 million baht (US\$25 million).

Authorities said they were investigating whether the network was connected to other crimes, including money laundering and illegal cryptocurrency trading.

Southeast Asia has emerged as a hub for the transnational scam industry in recent years, with organised crime groups and legions of scammers – some willing, others trafficked – stealing tens of billions of dollars annually from victims around the world. – AFP



Revellers dance during the annual “Pring Ka-Ek” or “spirit house” festival praying to an ancient guardian for rain, good fortune and peace with neighbouring Thailand on the outskirts of Phnom Penh yesterday. – AFP

Hospitalised Thai princess's condition 'deteriorated': palace

BANGKOK – The health condition of a Thai princess who has been hospitalised for more than three years has deteriorated, the palace said yesterday.

Princess Bajrakitiyabha Mahidol, the king's eldest daughter, fell ill during a military dog training session in December 2022 and has remained in hospital since.

She suffered from a severe blood infection and her lung and kidney functions were being supported by medical devices and medication, the palace previously said.

The Bureau of the Royal Household said in a statement yesterday that the princess had developed an abdominal infection from inflammation of the large intestine and was experiencing “unstable vital signs, low blood pressure, irregular heartbeat and abnormal blood coagulation”.

The palace added that Bajrakitiyabha was still relying on

medical equipment to support her lung and kidney functions, as well as medication.

“Her condition has continued to deteriorate,” it said, adding that the infection had become “uncontrollable and affected other organs”.

Educated in Britain, the United States and Thailand, Bajrakitiyabha held several positions with the United Nations and campaigned for better treatment of women in prisons.

Known in Thailand as “Princess Bha”, the 47-year-old is the only child from King Maha Vajiralongkorn's first marriage.

She is seen as close to her father, and was appointed to a senior role in his bodyguard command a year before her hospitalisation.

The 73-year-old king, who has seven children from four marriages, has not announced his chosen heir, though succession rules favour men.

– AFP

Taliban's new marriage separation decree draws UN criticism

KABUL – The Taliban government's new decree governing the separation of spouses "reinforces systemic discrimination" and erodes the rights of Afghan women and girls, the United Nations said yesterday.

Published in mid-May, the 31-article code sets out various grounds for separation in Afghanistan, including a husband's prolonged disappearance, "incompatibility" between couples, renunciation of Islam and "failure on the part of the husband".

The decree, which appeared in the country's Official Gazette, also states that marriage contracts drawn up by relatives "on behalf of a minor boy or girl" can be annulled, which suggests child marriage is permitted in Afghanistan, according to the UN.

In most cases, the procedures for women seeking a separation are more complicated than those for men.

The document, approved by Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada, "is part of a broader and deeply concerning trajectory in which the rights of Afghan women and girls are being eroded", said Georgette Gagnon, deputy special representative of the UN secretary-general.

It "further entrenches systemic discrimination in law and practice", the UN statement said, adding that women and girls are denied "autonomy, opportunities and access to justice".

Since returning to power in 2021, the Taliban government has banned girls from continuing their education beyond primary school, walking in parks and going to gyms, swimming pools or beauty salons.

They are required to cover themselves from head to toe and are barred from many jobs.

Any breach of the rules can result in arrest and imprisonment.

The UN's Afghanistan mission (UNAMA) said that following a decree issued in 2021 in which the Taliban authorities had "recognised certain rights for women, including women's consent to marriage", subsequent legislation has ultimately eroded those protections.

Article 5 of the decree has drawn widespread criticism.

It sets out the procedures for the separation of minors whose family members enter into a marriage contract on their behalf, which "implies that child marriage is permitted", according to UNAMA.

"If any relative other than the father or grandfather concludes a marriage contract on behalf of a minor boy or a minor girl with a compatible spouse and for a customary dower, the contract shall be valid," the decree says, before outlining how the boy or girl can choose to annul at puberty if approved by a court.

According to a traditional practice that has been in place in some families in Afghanistan for decades, parents promise that their child will marry a child from the other family.

However, the marriage contract is only concluded later, as sexual relations before puberty are prohibited under Islamic law.

The Taliban government's Ministry of Justice did not respond when asked by AFP whether the minor should be required to live with their spouse at any age.

Marriage was only permitted from the age of 16 for girls under the law in force until the Taliban took back power.

The decree makes a distinction between girls and boys' option to annul on reaching puberty, saying that if a "virgin girl" had previously remained silent, the decree considers her choice to separate as "invalidated".

However, "the choice upon obtaining puberty of a boy... is not invalidated by silence".

Government spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid dismissed criticism to the decree, telling the state-run RTA television channel on Wednesday it was coming from people "hostile" to Islam.

He defended fathers and grandfathers having authority over their children, including the power to enter into a marriage contract, provided they were "kind and healthy".

However, he said such cases would be rare because the Taliban "prohibits marrying off a girl without her permission".

The procedures also set out how a woman may remarry if her husband has gone missing, but not in the event of war.

In such cases, "the wife shall wait for such a period until his death becomes certain and until the people of his generation (peers) have all passed away".

If the missing person were to reappear after the woman had remarried, it would be up to him to decide whether to "keep" her, divorce or opt for mutual separation.

– AFP

Indonesia's Aceh flogs 4 for sex outside marriage

JAKARTA – Islamic officials in Indonesia's staunchly Sharia Aceh province publicly flogged two women and two men yesterday for having sex outside of marriage, an AFP reporter witnessed.

All dressed in white, the four winced and groaned as they received 100 lashes each with a rattan stick in front of dozens of onlookers in a public park in the provincial capital Banda Aceh.

"The women are sex workers, and the men are their customers," Muhammad Rizal, the head of Aceh's Islamic police force, told AFP.

Sex between people not married to each other is outlawed in Aceh, the county's only region to apply a version of Sharia law.

Five other people were also caned

yesterday, receiving between nine and 23 lashes each for crimes including being in the proximity of a member of the opposite sex and drinking alcohol.

Caning, though not a legal form of punishment in Indonesia, retains strong support in Aceh to punish a range of offences that also include gambling and gay sex.

In January, Sharia police flogged an unmarried couple 140 times each – likely the severest punishment since 2015, when a stricter form of Islamic law started to be applied in the province that enjoys a special autonomy.

Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim-majority country, but officially recognises six religions as well as indigenous beliefs.

– AFP



Sharia police and law officers carry a woman who fainted after being publicly caned in Banda Aceh, Indonesia yesterday, after being convicted of violating Aceh's Islamic law prohibiting sex outside marriage.

– AFP

Singapore dance teacher finds joy, healing in bird trails

SINGAPORE – As Singapore awakens each morning, dance teacher Jocelyn Chng often heads not to a studio, but to parks, wetlands and quiet corners of the city in search of birds.

What began as a way to pass time during the COVID-19 pandemic has turned into a deep passion for birdwatching and wildlife photography – one that now shapes how she sees nature, stress and even Singapore itself.

"I just feel like sometimes when I'm so stressed and buried in my work, I need to stop and go look at some birds," Chng told Xinhua on Wednesday, ahead of the International Day for Biological Diversity on May 22. She is one of the residents in this modern city who is increasingly connecting with biodiversity through citizen science and everyday encounters with wildlife.

Held annually since 1984, the Singapore Bird Race, organized by the Nature Society Singapore (NSS), is one of the longest-running citizen science events in Southeast Asia. Chng has participated in it for the past four years.

The race is designed to promote the appreciation, awareness, and conservation of wild birds in Singapore, as well as to raise awareness about local biodiversity among the general public. The data collected during this annual race has been used in guiding national conservation assessments and initiatives, according to NSS.

Participants spend about five hours traveling across Singapore trying to spot as many bird species as possible before submitting their observations to organizers as part of bird monitoring efforts, Chng said, "every year we try to do better than the previous year."

For Chng, birdwatching is not only a hobby but also a way to reconnect with nature in a fast-paced city.

"It's really interesting how birdwatching has changed my life. For me, it's a way to forget about work, have fun and relieve stress. When you're very stressed, going into nature really helps. Just walking around, seeing animals and birds going about their lives, and observing their behavior makes you realize there's something much bigger than yourself," Chng said.

Among her favorites are kingfishers, particularly the brightly colored black-backed



This photo lifted from Wikipedia showing a black-backed dwarf kingfisher with a frog in its beak was taken in September 2017 in Mangaon, Raigad, Maharashtra, India by Shantanu Kuveskar.

dwarf kingfisher and ruddy kingfisher.

"They are very beautiful, but also very challenging to photograph because they are small and like to hide among branches and leaves," she said.

Beyond their beauty, Chng believes birds play a crucial role in maintaining ecosystems through pollination, seed dispersal and predator-prey relationships.

"For example, the Asian openbills," she said. "These birds can help control invasive apple snails in Singapore's waterways by feeding on their eggs."

As her passion for birdwatching grew, it also began influencing people around her – including her mother.

"She started getting interested after seeing what I was doing," Chng said. "Now sometimes I bring her along and we go find birds together."

For Chng, biodiversity is not an abstract environmental concept but something deeply personal – found in the rustling leaves of a park, the flash of orange feathers in the trees, and the quiet moments that nature offers amid urban life.

– Xinhua

Israel deports all foreign activists from Gaza flotilla

Hiba Aslan

JERUSALEM – Israel said yesterday it had deported all the foreign activists seized by Israeli forces from a Gaza-bound flotilla, following international outcry over their treatment in custody.

More than 430 activists from countries around the world had been placed in detention in Israel after they were intercepted at sea on Monday while making the latest in a string of attempts to break the blockade of the Palestinian territory.

Israel's far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir sparked widespread condemnation and diplomatic backlash on Wednesday by posting a video showing the detained activists with their hands tied and foreheads on the ground.

Israel's foreign ministry spokesman, Oren Marmorstein, said yesterday that "all foreign activists from the PR flotilla have been deported from Israel."

"Israel will not permit any breach of the lawful naval blockade on Gaza," he added.

The legal centre representing the flotilla members said earlier yesterday that the majority were "en route for deportation" from Ramon Airport in Israel's far south.

Adalah said that the activists had been held at Israel's Ktziot prison, in the Negev Desert near Gaza.

Turkey had announced it was sending charter flights to Israel to repatriate Turkish citizens and participants from third countries.

Turkish foreign ministry sources later confirmed that "a total of 422 flotilla participants, 85 of whom are our citizens, are being brought to our country on special charter flights."

A spokesman for Adalah said activists from Egypt had been transferred to Taba at Egypt's border with Israel, while those from Jordan had been transferred to Aqaba.

'Inflammatory video'

Around 50 vessels under the Global Sumud Flotilla set sail from Turkey last week in the latest attempt by activists to breach Israel's blockade of Gaza, after Israeli forces intercepted a previous convoy last month.

The deportations come after footage posted by Ben Gvir, captioned "Welcome to Israel" and showing the minister heckling and waving an Israeli flag among the detained activists, sparked resounding condemnation by governments around the world, from Italy to Spain and Australia to Canada.

He was also criticised at home by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Gideon Saar,



This screen grab taken from footage released on Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir's X account on Wednesday shows scores of detained activists from the Gaza-bound aid flotilla kneeling with their hands tied behind their backs and their foreheads on the ground on the deck of a military boat in Israel. – AFP

as well as by US ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee.

Italy, Ireland and Spain have called on the European Union to sanction Ben Gvir, with Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani and Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez calling the treatment of the activists "unacceptable."

The United Kingdom announced it had summoned Israel's most senior diplomat in Britain following "the inflammatory video".

Francesca Albanese, an outspoken UN expert on the Palestinian territories, called on Italy, where she is from, to take action.

The treatment of the flotilla activists "is a luxury compared to what is inflicted on Palestinians in Israeli prisons," Albanese wrote on X.

"Words do not suffice: let Italy stop opposing the suspension" of the EU-Israel Association Agreement, she added.

'They kicked us'

Adalah's legal director Suhad Bishara told AFP Wednesday that the group's lawyers had been able to give legal counsel to "many" of the hundreds of activists, though she added that others had faced court hearings without legal assistance.

"We know of at least two participants who were hospitalised... both of them were shot by rubber bullets," Bishara said, adding that others said they feared they had broken ribs.

Alessandro Mantovani, an Italian journalist detained with the flotilla activists and deported before the others, told reporters at Rome's Fiumicino airport yesterday that he and others had been "taken to Ben Gurion airport in handcuffs and with chains on our feet and put on a flight to Athens".

"They beat us up. They kicked us and punched us and shouted 'Welcome to Israel'," he said of his treatment by Israeli security forces.

Israel controls all entry points into Gaza, under blockade since 2007.

Since the start of the Gaza war, sparked by Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel, the territory has suffered severe shortages of food, medicine and other essential supplies, with Israel at times halting aid deliveries entirely.

A previous flotilla was intercepted last month in international waters off Greece, with most activists expelled to Europe.

Two were brought to Israel, detained for several days and then deported. – AFP

Iran's Hormuz authority claims control of waters south of UAE port

TEHRAN – Iran's new body overseeing the Strait of Hormuz said its claimed area of control extends to Emirati waters, drawing a sharp rebuke from the Gulf neighbour.

Traffic through Hormuz, a vital global shipping conduit, has come under Iranian control since the outbreak of war with Israel and the United States on February 28.

Iran, which has blockaded the strait since the war and is charging ships for passage, has insisted that vessels must obtain permission from its armed forces.

In a post on X on Wednesday accompanied by a map, the newly-established Persian Gulf Strait Authority said it had outlined "the regulatory jurisdiction for the management" of the strait.

It said this covered the area between the line extending from "Kuh-e Mubarak in Iran to the south of Fujairah in the UAE... to the line connecting the tip of Qeshm island in Iran to Umm Al-Quwain in the UAE."

It added that "transit through this area for the purpose of passing through the Hormuz Strait requires coordination with, and authorisation from, the Persian Gulf Strait Authority."

The United Arab Emirates' Fujairah port hosts oil infrastructure designed to bypass the strategic waterway.

Emirati presidential adviser Anwar Gargash yesterday slammed the Iranian announcement.

"The regime is trying to establish a new reality born from a clear military defeat, but attempts to control the Strait of Hormuz or

infringe on the UAE's maritime sovereignty are nothing but pipe dreams," he posted on X.

Relations between Iran and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have been severely strained since the war, after Tehran launched missile and drone strikes against Gulf countries in response to US-Israeli attacks.

Iran last week accused the UAE of playing an active role in the war – a claim Abu Dhabi has denied.

The UAE has also strongly opposed Iran's control of the strait and called for joint action to ensure freedom of navigation through the waterway.

Last Friday, the UAE announced it was fast-tracking construction of a new oil pipeline bypassing Hormuz through Fujairah port.

The Abu Dhabi Media Office said the West-East Pipeline would double state oil giant ADNOC's export capacity through Fujairah, adding that it was expected to become operational next year.

Iran has repeatedly accused Gulf states of allowing US forces to carry out attacks from their territory.

Gulf nations have repeatedly denied the accusations, saying even before the conflict that they would not allow their territory or airspace to be used to attack Iran.

On Wednesday, Iran's Revolutionary Guards said they had allowed 26 ships including oil tankers and other vessels to pass through the strait over the previous 24 hours.

Last week, Iran said "more than 30 ships" had been allowed to pass, including some Chinese vessels. – AFP

Sweden sentences teen over plot to kill Iranian researcher

STOCKHOLM – A teenager who turned up on the doorstep of an Iranian researcher in southern Sweden armed with a knife was sentenced yesterday to almost four years in a young offenders institution.

The court did not reveal the teenager's name, identifying him only by the initials A.N. in its ruling; neither did it disclose his ethnicity. Court documents refer to him as a "boy". The defendant was 16 years old at the time of the incident in September 2025 and remained a minor during the trial.

The teenager was convicted along with two others of a plot to kill Arvin Khoshnood, a high-profile academic who maintains that the Iranian government was ultimately behind the attack.

The youngster was recruited through messaging apps by the other defendants and promised a payment to kill Khoshnood.

He showed up at Khoshnood's house in the city of Malmo in September last year and spoke to the researcher's wife.

The researcher stayed inside

and called the police. He has since been living in hiding at another address, his lawyer told AFP during the trial.

"The court considers it established that A.N. armed himself with a knife and went to the victim's home with the intention of killing him," the Uddevalla court wrote in its ruling.

The court found there was not enough evidence for a charge of attempted murder and reclassified the offence as preparatory acts to commit murder.

The main defendant was handed three years and nine months in a juvenile detention centre.

Khoshnood regularly appears in Swedish media as an expert on Iran.

On social media, he supports Reza Pahlavi, the son of the last Shah, who lives in exile in the United States and leads one of many opposition movements based abroad.

The prosecutor declined to comment on the possible involvement of a foreign power in the case. – AFP, MPD

Israel says soldier killed in Lebanon

JERUSALEM – An Israeli soldier "fell in combat" in southern Lebanon on Tuesday, the military said, bringing to 21 the number killed since the start of their latest operation against Hezbollah.

The military identified the latest casualty as Major Itamar Sapir,

a 27-year-old deputy company commander in the reservist 551st Brigade.

Israel launched a ground and air operation into Lebanon after the Iran-backed armed group Hezbollah launched rockets in response to US and Israeli strikes on its ally.

Israeli strikes on Lebanon have killed more than 3,000 people since March 2, according to Lebanese authorities.

Sapir's death brings the Israeli military toll to 21. One civilian contractor has also been killed.

– AFP

Musk's SpaceX bonus comes with unique condition: colonise Mars



SpaceX, Twitter and e-car maker Tesla CEO Elon Musk looks on as he speaks during his visit to the Vivatex technology startups and innovation fair at the Porte de Versailles exhibition centre in Paris, on June 16, 2023. — AFP

NEW YORK — SpaceX's blockbuster initial public offering (IPO) filing included some out of this world details, including a provision that founder Elon Musk's massive bonus only kicks in if one million humans settle on Mars.

The bonus structure, laid out in SpaceX's prospectus filed with US regulators on Wednesday, reads less like a compensation agreement and more like a science fiction plot.

Musk's bonus is contingent on SpaceX's stock market value hitting targets ranging from US\$400 billion to US\$6 trillion — along with the company moving a million people to a planet 225 million kilometres away.

Musk describes that ambition as essential to the long-term survival of the human race, though most experts see it as being at least decades away.

Still, Musk will do just fine if

the IPO goes ahead in the coming weeks as planned.

At the company's reported target valuation of US\$1.75 trillion, Musk's existing stake would be worth an estimated US\$735 billion — before a single person sets foot on the Red Planet.

A second, smaller bonus ties an additional 60 million shares to a different moonshot: building data centres in orbit capable of delivering 100 terawatts of computing power per year — a figure that dwarfs anything that exists on Earth today.

SpaceX filed for its long-awaited IPO on Wednesday, targeting a listing on the Nasdaq stock exchange under the ticker "SPCX" in what could be the largest public offering in Wall Street history.

The company's Starship rocket is explicitly designed with Mars colonisation in mind. — AFP

'People thought it was witchcraft': DR Congo's Ebola outbreak

BUNIA, DR Congo — The Ebola virus was circulating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) for several weeks before the outbreak was identified and declared, during which time affected communities believed it to be a "mystical illness".

The World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the Ebola outbreak — the 17th in the huge, impoverished country of more than 100 million inhabitants — an international health emergency on Sunday.

But, according to witnesses, the first suspected cases of the highly contagious haemorrhagic fever appeared from mid-April in the mining locality of Mongbwalu, in gold-rich Ituri province.

Insecurity is rife and access is difficult in the northeastern region, where different armed groups have roamed for years and massacres are regularly reported.

"Unfortunately, the alert spread slowly within the community," as people believed they were suffering from a "mystical illness", Congolese Health Minister Samuel Roger Kamba said Tuesday.

After a body was repatriated to Mongbwalu from Bunia, the Ituri provincial capital, "members of the family decided to change coffins", and then the first one "was burned by young people", John Vatsosi, a resident of Mongbwalu, told AFP.

But, he said, some local traditional chiefs wanted "to hold ceremonies before incinerating the coffin".

"After that, there were repeated deaths, sometimes between three and five people a day," he said.

"People then began to speculate, saying that the traditional leaders had cast a curse that was causing these deaths," he added.

'Witchcraft'

"An old dad was suspected of being a sorcerer who caused

people's deaths," Timothee Bedidjo, who also lives in Mongbwalu, said.

"Someone would be taken to hospital and a few minutes later the person would die, but the medical staff couldn't identify any kind of illness. Sometimes they spoke of a fever, sometimes of an as-yet unidentified outbreak," he added.

Some patients "decided to seek treatment from traditional healers, while others turned to servants of God for prayers," Vatsosi said.

In the days that followed, the virus spread in neighbouring areas, in a mining and commercial region where people are constantly on the move.

"In the beginning, there was chaos. There were cases of death and people thought it was witchcraft," said a hospital official in Rwampara, a locality near Bunia that quickly became one of the epicentres of the new Ebola outbreak.

"They brought us patients and we handled them as ordinary hospital admissions. There were no concrete signs that would allow us to associate the illness with Ebola," he said.

Health infrastructure in the DRC is largely lacking in human and financial resources.

It is often reliant on international organisations, whose funding to provide aid has been slashed recently particularly by the United States since President Donald Trump's return to the White House.

"We face technical limitations when it comes to detecting outbreaks such as Ebola. Some healthcare workers were even infected because they lacked appropriate protective equipment," the hospital official said.

He said the patients who make it to the hospital died within 24 hours.

But in isolated areas, infected people "die at home and their bodies are handled by their family

members", said Isaac Nyakulinda, a civil society official in Rwampara health area.

"We, the population, did not really know if it was an epidemic," he said.

"We regret that the government intervened late," he added emotionally.

Too few tests

In Bunia, tests were not available to identify the Bundibugyo strain, which is responsible for the new outbreak.

Health Minister Samuel Roger Kamba told reporters on Tuesday that testing equipment had been ready for the Zaire strain of the virus, which has been behind previous big Ebola outbreaks in the DRC.

"Samples had to leave the Bunia laboratory and be sent to the central laboratory" in the capital Kinshasa, delaying identification of the virus, the minister said.

The WHO has said it was alerted to the emergence of a highly lethal disease on May 5.

"This false rumour about the fetishist nature of the illness gradually began to disappear," Vatsosi said.

However, at that point, 246 suspected cases including 65 deaths had already been recorded.

The outbreak's origins have yet to be clearly established.

Bats are known to be carriers of the Ebola virus and are sometimes eaten by local residents in the DRC.

Over the years "Congolese people have been venturing ever deeper into the forests and coming into contact with the virus reservoir," Jean-Jacques Muyembe, head of the National Institute of Biomedical Research (INRB) and co-discoverer of Ebola in 1976, told reporters this week.

"Another factor is bush meat," he said, adding it was a main protein source for people living in rural areas. — AFP

Police investigate as French toddlers found alone on Portuguese road

LISBON — Portuguese and French authorities yesterday opened inquiries after two young French boys were found alone, in tears, by the side of a main road in southern Portugal.

French police were already searching for the children's mother after their father filed a police report alleging child abduction and the woman's family reported her missing.

Media reports in Portugal said she and her partner were believed to have abandoned the two boys — aged three and five — with backpacks containing food and water but no identity documents.

The adults are said to have blindfolded them and pretended to be playing a game before they drove away.

The authorities in both countries stressed no conclusions could yet be drawn.

"All hypotheses are on the table," Portuguese police spokesperson Major João Gaspar told AFP.

French prosecutor Jean Richert said the woman's family had reported her missing on May 11, and

a judicial inquiry had been launched to investigate the circumstances.

"What was surprising was that she wasn't at home, had no reason not to be there, and hadn't informed anyone," he told AFP.

The father of the boys, who is separated from the mother, "like everyone else, he doesn't understand", said Richert.

The Portuguese chief public prosecutor's office told AFP a court was investigating alongside the police inquiry, adding: "The children were taken to hospital, where they are under observation."

Portuguese motorist Alexandre Quintas was said to have found the children on Tuesday on a main road near the resort town of Comporta.

He took them to a bakery run by his family before alerting the authorities.

"We asked them if they liked ice cream," Quintas told the online outlet *Observador*.

"And we gave them something to eat and some toys to keep them occupied." — AFP



Medical staff in personal protective equipment (PPE) evacuate a patient on a stretcher from a Rwampara hospital yesterday, after protesters set the facility on fire. The mob was reportedly enraged after being denied access to the bodies of relatives killed in the latest Ebola outbreak

Cuba outraged after US indicts Raul Castro

HAVANA – Cubans expressed their shock and indignation after the United States indicted former president Raúl Castro on murder charges on Wednesday, a stunning new step in President Donald Trump’s pressure on the communist state.

The charges against the ex-leader – who at 94 years old remains influential in Cuban politics – have fuelled speculation that Trump will try to topple the crisis-hit island’s communist government, culminating a US pressure campaign which has imposed months of crippling oil blockades.

Authorities in Cuba and abroad slammed the indictment, the latest step-up in Trump’s international interventions after the Iran war, the US toppling of Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro and threats against Greenland.

The charges against Raúl Castro – younger brother of Fidel Castro, the late iconic US nemesis who led Cuba’s communist revolution that culminated in 1959 – stem from the deadly downing of two civilian planes manned by anti-Castro pilots in 1996.

Cuban authorities called on citizens to protest the “despicable” indictment, with the official newspaper *Granma* urging Cubans to gather outside the US embassy in Havana today.

“This isn’t really an accusation, something from more than 30 years ago, but rather a public attack on a public figure,” Fabián Fernández, a 30-year-old accountant, told AFP in Havana.

“It’s a matter of politics and public image,” he added.



A man cycles past a poster depicting (from left) the late Cuban leader Fidel Castro, former president Raúl Castro, and current President Miguel Díaz-Canel, in Havana on Wednesday. – AFP

In addition to murder, Castro has been charged with conspiracy to kill Americans and destruction of aircraft.

The Cuban government said in a statement that the 1996 shutdown was “legitimate self-defence” against an airspace violation.

“We expect that he will show up here by his own will or by another way and go to prison,” acting Attorney General Todd Blanche told a news conference in Miami attended by Cuban-Americans who cheered the announcement.

‘It’s criminal’

Pedro Leal, a 65-year-old

retiree, accused Washington of hurting ordinary Cubans.

“What the US government is doing here now, aside from the energy blockade preventing us from bringing in fuel, honestly, it’s criminal,” he said.

A four-month US oil blockade, part of a campaign to undermine Cuba’s communist leadership, has brought the island’s already battered economy to the brink of collapse.

Cubans have suffered power outages of up to 20 hours a day and taps running dry.

Runaway inflation has caused the price of basic goods to soar and mountains of trash have piled up on

the streets of Havana.

Iris Herrera, a 58-year-old self-employed woman, said she worried about a US military intervention in Cuba.

“I do not agree with a war by the United States here in Cuba,” she told AFP.

“It’s inhumane, because there will be deaths, There will be many deaths.”

Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel wrote on X that the charges carry no legal basis and “add to the file they are fabricating to justify the folly of a military aggression against Cuba.”

China led international reaction to the charge, saying it “firmly supports”

Cuba and urging the United States to deescalate tensions with the country.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun told a press briefing yesterday that Washington “should stop brandishing the sanctions stick and the judicial stick against Cuba and stop threatening force at every turn.”

Beijing’s comments came after the USS Nimitz aircraft carrier and its escort warships entered the Caribbean Sea, the military’s Southern Command said on Wednesday.

“Welcome to the Caribbean, Nimitz Carrier Strike Group!” the Southern Command posted on X, alongside a video flaunting the ship’s capabilities.

Trump has hailed the indictment as a “very big moment” but played down prospects of moving on Cuba.

“There won’t be escalation. I don’t think there needs to be. Look, the place is falling apart. It’s a mess, and they sort of lost control,” he told reporters on Wednesday.

Analysts were quick to draw comparisons with Venezuela, where the US government seized on a domestic indictment to justify military action in January that toppled and seized president Maduro, a staunch ally of Cuba.

“The idea is to say, we can do to you what we did to Nicolás Maduro,” Christopher Sabatini, senior fellow for Latin America at Chatham House told AFP.

“The military would certainly defend Cuba” in the event of US military intervention, Sabatini said.

“Whether the people would or not, it’s difficult to say,” he added.

– AFP

Leaked audio could derail Flávio Bolsonaro hopes for Brazil presidency

Analysis

BRASÍLIA – Brazil’s right-wing presidential candidate Flávio Bolsonaro was riding high in the polls until the news broke of his ties to a banker jailed over a multi-million dollar fraud scandal.

The 45-year-old senator had been polling neck-and-neck with 80-year-old President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who is expected to seek a fourth term in presidential elections in October.

But a change may be underway following the publication of an audio recording by investigative outlet *The Intercept* in which Bolsonaro asked disgraced banker Daniel Vorcaro to finance a film he was making about his father, former far-right president Jair Bolsonaro.

Polls had projected a Bolsonaro-Lula tie in the second round, giving a slight advantage to the right-wing hopeful.

Now, his ratings appear to have dwindled, with one poll putting the right-wing candidate seven points behind leftist Lula.

Vorcaro was the major shareholder in the small private Master Bank that collapsed last year, sparking a major fraud investigation that has rattled the highest echelons of power in Latin

America’s largest economy.

According to *The Intercept*, the contentious audio is part of a series of records documenting a deal in which Vorcaro pledged to contribute US\$24 million to the film “Dark Horse”, in which “The Passion of the Christ” star Jim Caviezel plays Jair Bolsonaro.

“It makes me uncomfortable to be asking you,” Flávio Bolsonaro tells the banker in the recording, calling him “brother.”

“We’re at a very decisive moment here with the film. And since there are many overdue payments, everyone is tense,” he says.

Just under half of that amount was actually paid, the publication said.

Bolsonaro said that “zero public funds” were involved in the transaction.

Unfazed

Bolsonaro is at the helm of the right-wing movement once steered by his father, who is in jail for an attempted coup.

The senator told his fellow Liberal Party (PL) members on Tuesday he felt “very calm” as the published recording threatened to dent his public support.



Brazilian Senator Flávio Bolsonaro, son of former President Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022) and a pre-candidate for the presidency, gestures upon arrival at the Presidente Juscelino Kubitschek International Airport in Brasília last Friday. – AFP

He did admit, however, that he had met with Vorcaro when the banker was under house arrest.

Nevertheless, his political supporters show no sign of bolting.

“There is no discussion whatsoever about the hypothesis of replacing Flávio” as party candidate, pro-Bolsonaro lawmaker Evair de Melo told AFP.

The left has meanwhile seized the opportunity to gain ground.

Ivan Valente, a member of

leftist Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL) which is allied with Lula’s Worker’s Party (PT), called the case “perhaps the most important development” of the pre-campaign.

“If the revelations continue, it will be lethal for Bolsonaro’s candidacy,” he told AFP, adding Lula may be able to curry favour among “disappointed” conservative voters.

‘Bolsonaro blood’

The recording had left

Bolsonaro “a very weakened candidate,” Márcio Coimbra, director of the think tank Casa Política, told AFP.

Despite the “wear and tear,” however, Bolsonaro senior will ensure his son’s candidacy “until the end,” according to Coimbra.

The former president endorsed his son over other more viable candidates as a way to “keep the right under his control” – and for that it was “necessary to have Bolsonaro blood,” he said.

The younger Bolsonaro has sought to portray himself as a more moderate politician than his father, although on issues such as security he has pledged to follow the hardline approach of El Salvador’s President Nayib Bukele.

Jair Bolsonaro “will always be my guiding star. He is my compass, my point of reference,” Flávio Bolsonaro told CNN Brasil.

The convicted ex-president’s son has also had run-ins with the justice system.

In 2020, the public prosecutor accused him of embezzling public funds when he was a state deputy in Rio de Janeiro, but the investigation was closed without charges.

– AFP



Senegal have 'big dreams' for 2026 World Cup

DAKAR - Senegal have "big dreams" to "achieve great things" at the 2026 World Cup, coach Pape Thiaw said yesterday as he unveiled an expanded 28-man squad for next month's tournament.

Key players include Sadio Mane, Idrissa Gana Gueye, Edouard Mendy and captain Kalidou Koulibaly, who has been sidelined since April 8 with a thigh injury.

Emerging stars Monaco's Lamine Camara, PSG forward Ibrahima Mbaye and Bayern Munich midfielder Bara Sapoko Ndiaye have also been included with striker Bamba Dieng, rewarded for his impressive end to the season with French club Lorient.

"It's a balanced and well thought out group to meet the demands of this World Cup, which is an intense competition," former Senegal international Thiaw told a press conference.

The Lions of Teranga will begin their campaign on June 16 against Kylian Mbappe's France in New Jersey. Group I also includes Norway and Iraq.

The two teams previously met in the opening match of the 2002 World Cup, their only encounter, which Senegal won and went on to reach the quarter-finals.

"Senegal have three opponents. Why focus on France?" he added.

"Norway and Iraq are there. We have a historical connection with

France. But for me, it's not a special match."

Senegal had a turbulent start to the year when they won the Africa Cup of Nations final in January, a victory later awarded on appeal in March to opponents and tournament hosts Morocco.

CAF cited regulations about leaving the field: during the match Senegalese players, coach Thiaw and his staff walked off the pitch in Rabat after Morocco were awarded an added-time penalty, which forward Brahim Diaz ultimately missed.

The Senegalese Football Federation has appealed CAF's decision at the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS). -AFP



Senegal football supporters cheer during the unveiling of Senegal's 2026 FIFA World Cup squad in Dakar yesterday. -AFP

Football shorts

Lustrinelli succeeds Eta as Union Berlin coach

BERLIN - Swiss coach Mauro Lustrinelli has replaced Marie-Louise Eta as coach of Union Berlin, the Bundesliga club announced yesterday.

Lustrinelli, 50, arrives fresh from leading Thun to a stunning debut Swiss Super League title a year after their promotion to the top flight.

The former Swiss international replaces Eta, who became the first female coach of a men's club in a major European league when she took over on an interim basis in April.

Eta, who claimed seven points in five matches to help Union beat the drop, will take over as coach of the club's women's side as previously agreed.

German media reported Union will pay around one million euros (US\$1.1 million) to Thun to release Lustrinelli from his contract.

"Union is a special club with clear values and honest people. I'm highly motivated and looking forward to embarking on a new journey together with the board, the staff, the fans, and of course, the team," the coach said in a statement.

Union managing director Horst Heldt praised the coach's style of play and willingness to blood young players.

"Winning the championship with a newly promoted side speaks to his expertise, but also to his ability to lead and inspire a group," Heldt said.

Lustrinelli served as assistant coach to former Union mentor Urs Fischer, who took the club to the Bundesliga for the first time in 2019 - and completed a stunning rise to qualify for the Champions League four seasons later. -AFP

In Ankara, Iran World Cup squad players start US visa process

ANKARA - At least four Iranian footballers and one of their entourage went to the US embassy in Ankara yesterday to submit visa applications for the World Cup, an AFP correspondent said.

The squad arrived in Turkey's southern Antalya resort on Monday for a training camp ahead of the 2026 tournament that is being co-hosted by United States, which began bombing Iran alongside Israel on February 28, sparking war.

A ceasefire agreement has halted hostilities since April 8.

Four players in navy blue tracksuits along with a staffer in black could be seen entering the embassy in the morning, the correspondent said.

The players were also expected to follow similar procedures at the Canadian embassy - which alongside Mexico is a co-host of the World Cup.

Iran and the United States cut diplomatic ties in 1980 but the Iranian football federation vice-president on Tuesday said he was "very confident" in FIFA's protocols as the team prepare to play at the World Cup.

"Team Melli", as the Iran squad is known, will play two friendlies ahead of the World Cup in Antalya against Gambia on May 29 and Mali on June 4.

Iran have been drawn in Group G and open their campaign against New Zealand in Los Angeles on June 15.

They will then face Belgium in the same city, and round off their group matches against Egypt in Seattle.

Iran are seeking to reach the knockout stages for the first time, having fallen short in their previous six appearances in the World Cup finals. -AFP



UEFA introduces two-tier qualifying process for 2030 World Cup

LAUSANNE - UEFA on Wednesday said it would create a two-tier qualifying system for the 2030 World Cup that will be similar to the format used in the Champions League.

The top league will comprise 36 countries - determined by the restructured 2028/29 UEFA Nations League - and be divided into three groups of 12 teams.

Every team will play six home-or-away matches against six different opponents - two from each pot, mirroring the current format used in UEFA club competitions.

The best-ranked nations from the

three League 1 groups will qualify for the World Cup, with the remaining places decided via play-offs.

The other 18, lower-ranked countries will compete in League 2 and would also have a chance to qualify.

"The new formats will improve competitive balance, reduce the number of dead matches, offer a more appealing and dynamic competition to fans, while ensuring a fair qualification chance for all teams and without adding any additional dates in the international calendar," said UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin.

"The changes will grow the value of

UEFA men's national team football."

UEFA also announced the Nations League would shift from four leagues to three divisions of 18 teams. Each league will be composed of three groups of six teams.

They will play six matches against five different opponents - home or away against teams from different pots, with home-and-away fixtures against the opponent of their same pot.

The latter stages will remain the same with quarter-finals and the Final Four, as well as promotion/relegation play-offs. -AFP



Germany's goalkeeper Manuel Neuer warms up ahead of the UEFA Euro 2024 quarter-final against Spain at the Stuttgart Arena in Stuttgart on July 5, 2024. Veteran goalkeeper Neuer was handed a surprise recall to Germany's 26-man World Cup squad yesterday, coming out of international retirement to play in the tournament for a fifth time. -AFP

FA launches Southampton probe over 'spygate' scandal



LONDON - The Football Association is investigating Southampton over the "spygate" scandal that resulted in the club's expulsion from tomorrow's Championship play-off final.

Saints admitted observing a training session held by semi-final opponents Middlesbrough earlier this month, as well as two other similar incidents during the season.

The FA is looking at whether charges should be brought, following the decision by an English Football League independent disciplinary commission to kick Southampton out of the play-offs and dock the club four points for next season.

An FA spokesperson said yesterday: "We will now investigate and won't comment further until we have assessed the evidence."

The club's appeal against their punishment was dismissed on Wednesday,

with Middlesbrough replacing them in the Wembley final against Hull.

Southampton beat Middlesbrough 2-1 over two legs in the play-off semi-finals.

Saints chief executive Phil Parsons said the sanctions imposed were "manifestly disproportionate".

Kicking the club out of the play-offs denies them a shot at a Premier League place and with it an estimated £200 million (US\$269 million) in additional revenue as a minimum.

Southampton player of the year Leo Scienza described the punishment as "heartbreaking" and said the club's fans "definitely deserved better".

"We gave everything for this dream," he posted on Instagram. "Day after day, sacrifice after sacrifice, always believing we could bring this club back to where it belongs."

"For me, the dream of playing in the

Premier League was something I fought for with everything I had. That's why this pain cuts so deep."

Tonda Eckert's future as Southampton boss is now in major doubt, while reports suggest players are considering legal action against the club.

Saints, relegated from the Premier League last year, said in a statement that "trust now needs to be rebuilt".

At the 2024 Paris Olympics, Canada's women's team - the defending champions at the time - were found guilty of spying on New Zealand, using a drone.

Football's world governing body FIFA banned three members of staff, including the head coach Bev Priestman, from football for a year, and docked them six points.

The winners of tomorrow's play-off final will join already promoted Coventry and Ipswich in the Premier League next season. -AFP

Antonelli seeks to extend sensational start with 4th win

F1

MONTREAL – Italian teenager Kimi Antonelli seeks a sensational fourth consecutive victory to boost his F1 drivers' title bid this weekend, but expects a robust response from Mercedes team-mate George Russell at the Canadian Grand Prix.

The 19-year-old rising star of Italian sport leads the Briton, nine years his senior and the pre-season favourite for the title, by 20 points after four rounds of the 22-race championship as Mercedes unveil a major upgrade package.

For Russell, it is important to re-establish his authority in the team after two fourth-place finishes allowed his team-mate to revel in being the sole Silver Arrows man, astride

the top of the podium.

"I am expecting George, for sure, to be super-strong again in Canada," said Antonelli, whose precocious talent, wide smile and curly hair have become an image of Italian sporting optimism following their football team's failure to qualifying for the World Cup.

"He's always been strong in Montreal and he won last year so I have to be ready and be fully focused. I will do my best."

In addition to his hat-trick of pole, victory and fastest lap last year, Russell took pole at the Circuit Gilles Villeneuve in 2024 and will fancy his chances of winning both tomorrow's sprint race and Sunday's Grand Prix.

Last year, Antonelli was fourth on the grid and finished third, his first podium finish.

This time, he hopes to be the first Italian since Alberto Ascari in 1952 to claim four straight wins, when he reeled off six.

Mercedes' team chief Toto Wolff has side-stepped frenzied talk of Antonelli's prospects to concentrate on keeping balanced and cool.

"Performance is only performance when it is delivered on track," he stressed.

"We are just four races into the season and there is a long year ahead. It is an important race for us, but it does not decide anything. So, we stay balanced, keep learning and execute as well as we can."

Mercedes' challengers hopeful

The championship-leading Silver Arrows men are likely to be challenged by Ferrari, McLaren and Red Bull, with four-time champion Max Verstappen, who took part at the Nurburgring 24-Hours race last weekend, aiming to add to his three previous wins for Red Bull.

World champion Lando Norris won the sprint last year ahead of McLaren team-mate

Oscar Piastri, but the pair collided in the Grand Prix which ended up finishing behind a safety car.

Lewis Hamilton and his Ferrari team-mate Charles Leclerc will also be strong contenders despite team boss Fred Vasseur grumbling about rule changes, notably to the starting procedures, that have negated an advantage they enjoyed.

"It was a bit harsh for us," he said of the introduction of a blue light five-second warning to ensure teams spooled up their turbos.

"I understand what they did, for safety grounds, but the other option would have been to ask the others to start from the pit-lane if they think it's not safe."

Lance Stroll will be the only Canadian in the race, but like team-mate Fernando Alonso has little optimism as Aston Martin have struggled for performance with an uncompetitive Honda engine.

Alonso has hinted he is likely to retire from F1 and will decide his future during the summer months of the European leg of the season. – AFP



Kimi Antonelli of Italy and Mercedes AMG Petronas F1 Team arrives in the Paddock during previews ahead of the F1 Grand Prix of Canada at Circuit Gilles-Villeneuve yesterday in Montreal, Quebec. – AFP

Sport in brief

Mixed results for China on Day 3 of Malaysia Masters

Badminton

KUALA LUMPUR – Chinese shuttlers produced mixed results on Day 3 of the 2026 Malaysia Masters yesterday, with rising star Hu Zhe'an advancing in the men's singles, while Cheng Xing and Zhang Chi were eliminated in the mixed doubles.

In men's singles, reigning world junior champion Hu rallied past France's Alex Lanier 15-21, 21-16, 21-15. His teammate Li Shifeng cruised to a 21-14, 21-9 victory over Japan's Yudai Okimoto, while Lu Guangzu defeated Japan's Kodai Naraoka 21-7, 21-19.

In women's singles, Chen Yufei beat India's Devika Sihag 21-16, 21-13.

Men's doubles pair Hu Keyuan and Lin Xiangyi overcame India's Hariharan Amsakarunan and Arjun Madathil Ramachandran.

In women's doubles, Bao Lijing and Cao Zihan edged Thailand's Hathaitip Mijad and Napapakorn Tungkasatan. Chen Fanshutan and Luo Xumin defeated Indonesia's Lanny Tria Mayasari and Apriyani Rahayu, while Luo Yi and Wang Tingge beat Chinese Taipei's Lin Chih Chun and Yang Chu Yun.

In mixed doubles, Gao Jiaxuan and Wei Yaxin outclassed Thailand's Supak Jomkoh and Ornmicha Jongsathapornpan. Meanwhile, Guo Xinwa and Chen Fanghui defeated compatriots Zhu Yijun and Li Qian.

China also suffered several defeats on the day, with Zhu Xuanchen and Han Qianxi being knocked out of the men's singles and women's singles draws respectively. Others to bow out of the tournament included men's doubles pairs Xie Haonan and Zeng Weihai, and Huang Di and Liu Yang, as well as mixed doubles duo Cheng Xing and Zhang Chi. – Xinhua

Belgium's Segaert snatches Giro 12th stage, Eulalio stays in pink

Cycling

NOVI LIGURE, Italy – Alec Segaert won the 12th stage of the Giro d'Italia yesterday after a surprise late attack denied the sprinters their chance of a bunch finish, as his teammate Afonso Eulalio again stayed in the overall lead.

Belgian Segaert won his first ever stage on a Grand Tour after making a charge for the line with just over three kilometres remaining in an eventful stage.

The 23-year-old Bahrain Victorious rider prevailed in Novi Ligure in an eventful 175km stage from Imperia which saw key sprint rivals Jonathan Milan and Paul Magnier dropped on the final Bric Berton climb.

Portuguese Eulalio extended his lead over pre-race favourite Jonas Vingegaard to 33 seconds after claiming intermediate sprint points.

In the early part of the stage several attacks pulled away before being clawed back by the peloton, until a six-man group, none contending any of the jerseys on offer, created a gap of two minutes before the Colle Giovo climb.

That sweeping climb, which ended with the break caught, came around 80km from a finish which looked perfect for the sprinters.

Two of those sprint contenders, France's Paul Magnier and home hope Jonathan Milan, drifted off the back of the peloton near the crest of the subsequent Bric Berton climb where the steep gradient put the non-climbers to the test.

Milan and Magnier could not close the gap on a rapid peloton and ended up finishing several minutes off the pace.

But it was not to be a sprinter's finish thanks to Segaert's bold burst which made it perfect day for his team.

Today the peloton will take on a largely flat run between Alessandria and Verbania which features two punchy climbs towards the end of the 189km stage. – AFP



Sinner, Djokovic kept apart in French Open draw

Jed Court

PARIS – Jannik Sinner and Novak Djokovic will not be able to meet until the French Open final after the pair were placed in opposite halves of the men's draw yesterday, while Coco Gauff could face Aryna Sabalenka in the women's semis.

Sinner, the red-hot men's title favourite in the absence of injured rival Carlos Alcaraz, will start his bid for a maiden Roland Garros crown against French wildcard Clement Tabur, the world number 165.

Women's world number one Sabalenka faces a tough potential road to the final, with Naomi Osaka, Victoria Mboko and reigning champion Gauff all potential hurdles for the Belarusian.

The build-up to the event, which gets under way on Sunday, has been overshadowed by threats from players to boycott some of their media duties over a pay dispute with Grand Slam tournament organisers.

"We are not going to budge," tournament director Amelie Mauresmo told reporters at the draw in Paris, adding she was a "little saddened" by the situation.

"We have prize money that has (...) doubled in 10 years, and has also increased significantly recently."

World number one Sinner is slated to meet big-hitting American fifth seed Ben Shelton in the quarter-finals.

Daniil Medvedev is a possible semi-final opponent for the Italian.

The Russian gave Sinner a rare scare in the Italian Open semis earlier this month before eventually succumbing in three sets.

Sinner won his sixth consecutive Masters 1000 trophy by beating Casper Ruud in the Rome final.

That made the four-time Grand Slam champion only the second man to complete the set of all nine Masters 1000 titles, after Novak Djokovic.

Third seed Djokovic will kick off his latest tilt at a record-breaking 25th Grand Slam title against home player Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard.

Second seed Alexander Zverev is a potential semi-final opponent for Djokovic, who turns 39 on Friday.

The German has played Djokovic twice before at Roland Garros, suffering quarter-final defeats against the Serb in 2019 and last year.

Djokovic is hoping to finally break out of his tie with Margaret Court on 24 Slam titles with a first major triumph since the 2023 US Open.

Zverev, still without a Grand Slam trophy after several near misses, plays Frenchman Benjamin Bonzi in round one.

The stand-out first-round tie sees in-form French number one Arthur Fils take on 41-year-old former champion Stan Wawrinka, featuring at the tournament for the last time before retirement.

Home favourite Gael Monfils, a semi-finalist in 2008, starts his farewell French Open against fellow countryman Hugo Gaston.

Sabalenka v Osaka possible last-16 tie

American fourth seed Gauff, who beat world number one Sabalenka in a tense final 12 months ago, will start her title defence against compatriot Taylor Townsend.

Sabalenka, who has never won the Roland Garros tournament, was handed a difficult draw.

Four-time Grand Slam champion Osaka is a potential last-16 opponent for Sabalenka, although the Japanese star has never previously reached the second week in Paris.

Rising Canadian prospect Mboko or fifth seed Jessica Pegula could await the Belarusian in the quarters.

Sabalenka will take on Jessica Bouzas Maneiro of Spain in the first round.

Gauff may need to get past fellow American Amanda Anisimova, who lost the Wimbledon and US Open finals last year, in the last eight.

Four-time French Open champion Iga Swiatek, seeded third, could meet Italian Open winner Elina Svitolina in the quarters.

Second seed Elena Rybakina, who won the year's opening Grand Slam event at the Australian Open, is slated to face Swiatek in the semi-finals.

Poland's Swiatek will start her campaign against 17-year-old Australian wildcard Emerson Jones, while Rybakina plays Slovenia's Veronika Erjavec.

There is a possible all-Southeast Asian clash in the second round between Indonesia's Janice Tjen and the Philippines' Alexandra Eala.

If that tie materialises, it may be for a last-32 meeting with Osaka. – AFP

Winston Churchill's 'playful' paintings go on show in London

LONDON – As Britain's wartime leader, Winston Churchill was known for his stirring speeches, but a new London exhibition explores another side to his creativity – as a passionate and prolific artist.

The exhibition opening tomorrow at the Wallace Collection will be the most significant display of the statesman's paintings for more than 60 years, including over 50 canvases, many of them rarely seen in public.

Churchill first tried painting during World War I after he resigned from the government over the 1915 failed Dardanelles naval attack.

This was a "very difficult time in his life" when "he suddenly finds himself with all this unwanted leisure time", Lucy Davis, co-curator of the exhibition, told AFP.

"And he discovered painting as a way of releasing the stress, the anguish that the situation had caused him."

The museum presents a chronological survey starting with his first paintings, created with advice from renowned artist John Lavery, then canvases painted in the 1920s at Chartwell, the country house where Churchill lived with his family.

Largely self-taught while associating with well-known painters, Churchill quickly became interested



A gallery assistant poses for a photograph by 'Bottlescape 1932' at the "Winston Churchill: The Painter" exhibition at the Wallace Collection in London on Wednesday. – AFP

in landscape painting and drew inspiration from holidays in the south of France to create brightly coloured canvases dominated by blues and ochre.

'Loved the light'

Churchill "saw painting as a spur to travel" and "just loved the light and warmth and atmosphere, which he captures so beautifully", said Davis.

A whole room is dedicated to canvases inspired by trips to Morocco, including "The Tower of the Koutoubia Mosque", the only painting that Churchill did during

World War II. A gift to US President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the painting recently belonged to Hollywood star Angelina Jolie.

The exhibition ends with the post-war period when Churchill, defeated in a general election, began painting again and continued until his death in 1965, with some of his works going on display at the Royal Academy.

Churchill had previously shown paintings at various galleries, but always under an assumed name.

As a statesman, Churchill went down in history for his wartime



Gallery assistants pose for a photograph beside an easel used by Winston Churchill, at the "Winston Churchill: The Painter" exhibition at the Wallace Collection in London on Wednesday. – AFP

leadership, but as an artist, he had little interest in depicting current world events, the curator stressed.

"He was a wartime leader. He was known for these very stirring wartime speeches. But in these paintings, you really see his joie de vivre, his witty side, his playful side."

One painting at the exhibition

is an exception: "The Beach At Walmer", painted in 1938 as fears grew of imminent war.

It shows a sandy beach in southern England with bathers paddling. But in the foreground, a black cannon points at the sea, suggesting a looming threat.

– AFP

Radio station sorry after announcing death of King Charles

LONDON – A former British pirate radio station on Wednesday apologised "for any distress caused" after accidentally announcing the death of King Charles III.

The erroneous announcement was made on Tuesday due to a computer error at its main studio in Maldon in eastern Essex, Radio Caroline said in a post on social media.

The error had triggered the so-called death of a monarch procedure "which all UK stations hold in readiness while hoping not to require", wrote station manager Peter Moore.

"Radio Caroline then fell silent as would be required, which alerted us to restore programming and issue an on-air apology," he

said on Facebook post.

"Caroline has been pleased to broadcast Her Majesty the Queen's and now the King's, Christmas message and we hope to do so for many years to come," he said, referring to the monarch's traditional Christmas Day message to the nation.

"We apologise to HM [his majesty] the king and to our listeners for any distress caused," Moore added.

The mishap on Tuesday came as Charles and Queen Camilla were in Northern Ireland, where they joined a performance with an Irish folk group.

The post did not say how long it was before the mistake was discovered, but the domestic Press Association (PA) news agency reported

that on Wednesday afternoon (local time), playback for Tuesday's broadcast between 1:58 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. was unavailable on the station's website.

Established in 1964 to challenge the BBC's broadcasting monopoly, Radio Caroline previously operated from ships off the English coast.

After legislation in 1967 forced many pirate broadcasters to close, it continued intermittently before ending offshore broadcasts in 1990.

Caroline and other similar pirate stations inspired the 2009 comedy film "The Boat that Rocked" starring Bill Nighy and Philip Seymour Hoffman about a group of eccentric DJs living and working together at sea. – AFP

'Bohemian Rhapsody' star Malek says has Freddie Mercury 'in soul'

Cannes, France

CANNES – Egyptian-American actor Rami Malek, who starred as Freddie Mercury in the blockbuster biopic "Bohemian Rhapsody", said on Wednesday he had the Queen star "in my soul" as he prepared to hit screens in a new musical role.

The 45-year-old is the lead in "The Man I Love" by US director Ira Sachs about a fictional gay artist with AIDS in New York, which premiered at the Cannes Film Festival on Wednesday.

"I think Freddie Mercury will help me for the rest of my life,"

Malek told AFP and a small group of journalists.

"Freddie is someone I never want to get rid of. He resides somewhere in my soul, and I hope he keeps advising me throughout my life," he added of the late rocker he played in the 2018 film, who died of complications of AIDS in 1991.

He wondered about the career risks of accepting another musical role in "The Man I Love", which is competing for the best picture prize in Cannes.

"When I first read the script, I wondered if it was too similar. But it's a different world, a different

energy, so I took the plunge," he said.

The film follows performer Jimmy George as he moves through the underground New York music scene of the late 1980s at the height of the AIDS epidemic.

Sachs, 60, a key figure in American independent cinema, delved into his own memories to recreate the New York that was both hit hard by AIDS and driven by sexual and celebratory energy.

His latest film is one of 22 in the main competition in Cannes, with the winner set to be announced on Saturday. – AFP

Spacey walks Cannes red carpet as comeback continues

CANNES – Hollywood actor Kevin Spacey walked the red carpet at the Cannes Film Festival on Wednesday, marking another step in his comeback from sexual assault allegations.

The star of "American Beauty" and drama series "House of Cards" saw his once-stellar career derailed by multiple allegations of sexual offences, which first emerged in 2017 as part of the #MeToo movement.

Spacey, who maintained his innocence, was acquitted of nine cases of alleged sex offences in Britain in 2023 and a New York court dismissed a US\$40 million civil sexual misconduct lawsuit against the "Usual Suspects" actor in 2022.

In March this year, he settled out of court with three men who had launched a UK civil suit against him.

The 66-year-old, who collected a lifetime achievement award from a charity in Cannes last year, attended the premiere of a French blockbuster about political leader Charles de Gaulle with model Via

Lemann on Wednesday.

Cannes Festival unveiled a no-tolerance policy on sexual misconduct last year, under pressure from lawmakers and #MeToo anti-abuse activists.

A French actor, Theo Navarro-Mussy, who faced rape allegations by three women, was barred in 2025 from the premiere of a French film in the running for the festival's top prize.

Spacey told Britain's *Telegraph* newspaper in November last year that he had no fixed home anymore and had spent his fortune, with "very little coming in and everything going out".

He performed in the film "Peter Five Eight" in 2024, which was largely ignored by critics, and took a first TV role since the scandals late last year in "Minimarket", a comedy series for Italy's state broadcaster RAI, Variety reported.

He won the best supporting actor Oscar for the 1996 film "The Usual Suspects" and best actor in 2000 for "American Beauty".

– AFP

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 15°C~20°C	Manila 25°C~36°C	New York 12°C~19°C	Lisbon 17°C~31°C
Shanghai 21°C~29°C	Bangkok 26°C~35°C	London 15°C~27°C	Rio de Janeiro 19°C~22°C
Hong Kong 24°C~29°C	Tokyo 11°C~17°C	Frankfurt 13°C~27°C	Luanda 21°C~25°C
Taipei 24°C~32°C	Singapore 24°C~32°C	Vancouver 12°C~21°C	Maputo 15°C~27°C
Guangzhou 24°C~31°C	Kuala Lumpur 25°C~36°C	Paris 14°C~28°C	Dili 24°C~31°C
Nanjing 20°C~29°C	Jakarta 24°C~34°C	Moscow 16°C~29°C	São Tomé 26°C~31°C
Guilin 22°C~29°C	Seoul 13°C~26°C	Las Vegas 20°C~34°C	Praia 20°C~29°C
Xi'an 17°C~26°C	Sydney 15°C~20°C	Monte Carlo 16°C~24°C	Bissau 24°C~34°C



Seine's Alpine cave

This photograph shows a view of the installation of "The Pont Neuf cave", artwork by French photographer and street artist JR, over the Seine River in Paris yesterday. - AFP

Colourful jellies

Moon jellyfish submerged in water are seen at the Aquarium of the Pacific's new "Jelly Dreamscapes" exhibit in Long Beach, California, on Wednesday, ahead of the opening to the public tomorrow. The boneless invertebrates which lack backbones, brains and gills are made up of about 95 percent water and move across the oceans using water currents. - AFP



Fogbound bridge

In this aerial view, fog rolls by the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, California on Wednesday. - AFP



For reefs everywhere

Performers wear coral reef-inspired costumes during a show to raise awareness of threats to Australia's Great Barrier Reef in Sydney yesterday. - AFP



Still not finished!

This general view of the Sagrada Familia basilica taken yesterday shows the newly revealed 17-metre-high and 13.5-metre-wide cross that completes the temple's main Tower of Jesus Christ in Barcelona. The Sagrada Familia basilica's central tower's cross crowns the world's tallest church at 172.5 metres, a temple conceived by Antoni Gaudi more than 140 years ago. - AFP

Bedtime my lovelies!

An oriental white stork tends to its chicks at a wetland in Qiqihar, Heilongjiang Province, on Tuesday. - Xinhua

