

Sam 'distressed' by boy's zebra crossing death, vows to prevent similar tragedies

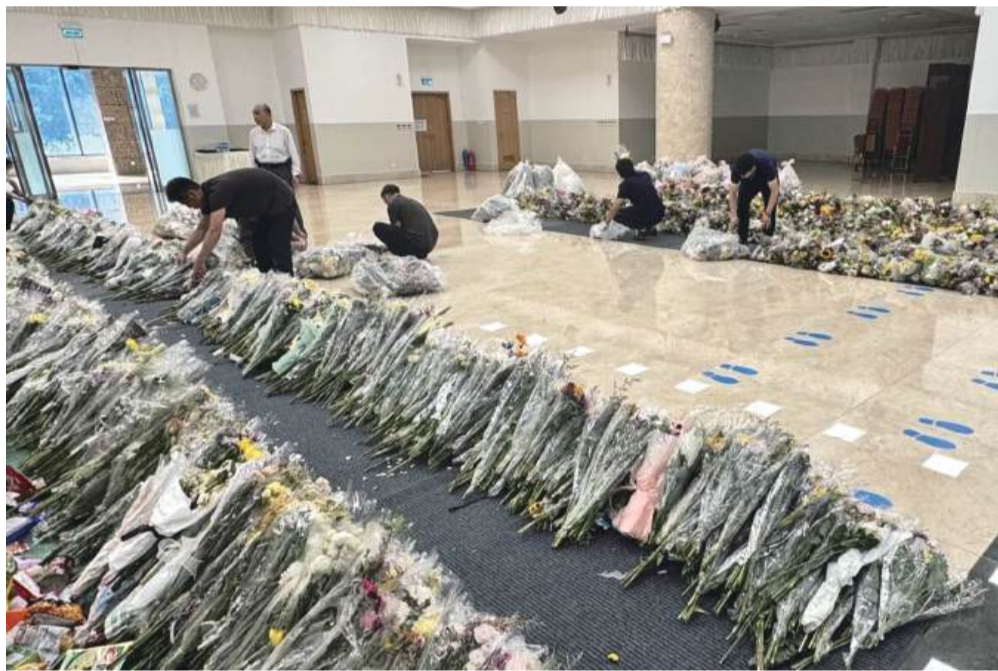
Staff Reporter

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai has conveyed a personal message to the public through Secretary for Administration and Justice Wong Sio Chak regarding the fatal accident in which a 10-year-old local boy died after a car knocked him down and ran him over on a zebra crossing on Wednesday night.

In his message conveyed by Wong, Sam said that he has ordered the respective law enforcement agencies to investigate and handle the case thoroughly and rigorously while also instructing the respective public entities to take all necessary measures to prevent similar tragedies from occurring again.

Wong, who is also the spokesman for the government's top advisory Executive Council, conveyed Sam's message during the advisory council's press conference at Government Headquarters on Friday about the completion of the government's drafting of several bills. Wong read out Sam's message at the start of the press conference.

The Public Security Police (PSP) arrested the car driver, a local man who is in his forties, on Wednesday night for alleged homicide by negligence. He was transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) on Thursday morning for further investigation and questioning. According to Article 134 of the Macau Penal Code, homicide by negligence is punishable by a prison term of up to three years. In the case of gross



Workers arrange floral tributes and other items in Kiang Wu Funeral Parlour on Saturday. After a boy was killed by a car on a zebra crossing on Avenida do Conselheiro Borja on Wednesday night last week, numerous residents left floral tributes and other items on the pavement next to the zebra crossing, before they were relocated to the funeral parlour by municipal workers on Saturday. – Photo courtesy of TDM

negligence, the offender faces a prison term of up to five years.

The accident occurred on the easternmost section of Avenida do Conselheiro Borja (青洲大馬路), when the boy was walking across the zebra crossing outside a PSP station situated next to the site where the

now defunct greyhound racetrack (Yat Yuen Canidrome) is located.

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

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

The fatal case has unleashed an overwhelming wave of grief and anger across Macau's civil society. Observers said that the public reaction can be regarded as being unprecedented in scale and intensity, unseen in Macau in living memory. Apart from widespread outrage among netizens on social media, many residents flocked to the pavement next to the zebra crossing on the day after the fatal accident, leaving behind an ever-growing collection of tributes. Flowers in a wide range of colours blanketed the concrete, while various toys, including dolls and teddy bears, snacks, drinks, and various other items were carefully arranged by the grieving public.

There were still residents leaving floral tributes and other items on the pavement next to the zebra crossing on Friday and Saturday. The school where the boy studied asked government municipal workers to transfer the floral tributes and items from the pavement to the nearby Kiang Wu Funeral Parlour on Saturday, according to local media reports.

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

Continued on p.6

2026 cash handouts to start on July 1

Tony Wong

The government has announced that its 2026 wealth-sharing cash handouts will be issued from July 1, with the programme's modus operandi to remain unchanged from last year.

Last year, it was the first time that the government introduced major amendments to the modus operandi of its annual wealth-sharing programme since its launch in 2008, by rolling out the 183-day requirement.

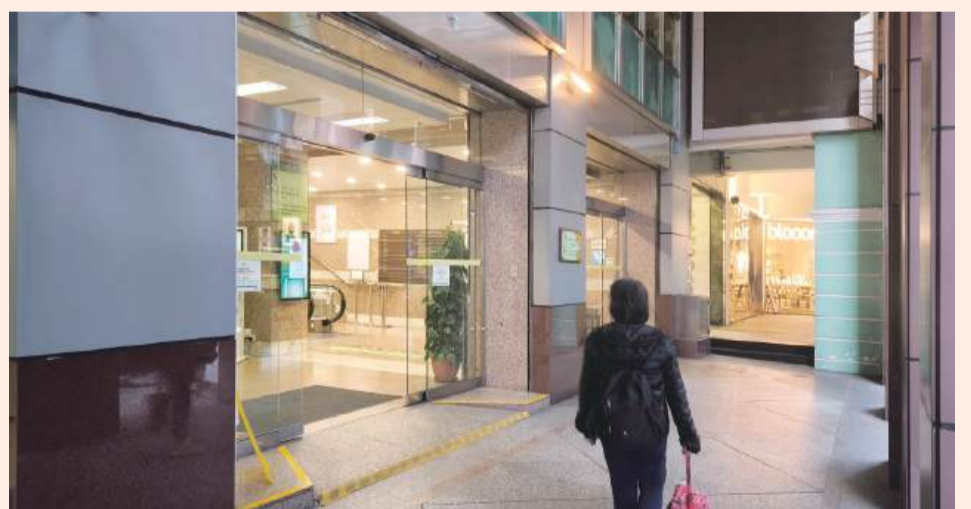
The government's wealth-sharing cash handouts this year will, in general, only be issued to Macau residents who stayed in Macau for at least 183 days in 2025, while those not staying in Macau due to at least one of eight formally defined reasons can submit their applications from June 15 requesting that they be officially exempted from the minimum stay requirement.

Since the government's annual wealth-sharing programme was launched in 2008, the cash handouts had previously been paid out to every Macau permanent and non-permanent resident ID card holder until 2024, irrespective of place of birth, nationality, age, and current place of residence.

Eligible permanent local residents will receive 10,000 patacas each this year, while eligible non-permanent local residents will get 6,000 patacas each, with the amounts of the handouts for each beneficiary unchanged from last year.

Secretary for Administration and Justice Wong Sio Chak, who is also the spokesman for the government's top advisory Executive Council, announced the government's 2026 wealth-sharing cash handouts during a press conference at Government Headquarters on Friday.

Continued on p.7



This file photo taken late last year shows a woman walking past the headquarters of the Financial Services Bureau (DSF) in Nam Van. The government's annual cash handouts are issued by the bureau. – Photo: Tony Wong

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

The Macau Post Daily

China-Canada ties have set sail again: Wang Yi

Visiting Foreign Minister Wang Yi said on Friday that the bilateral relationship has set sail again. Wang made the remarks during talks with his Canadian counterpart Anita Anand. – Story on p. 7

Africa CDC says over 1,100 suspected Ebola cases in DR Congo, Uganda

Over 1,100 people are suspected of having contracted Ebola in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and neighbouring Uganda, the head of the African Union's health agency said yesterday. – Story on p. 11

Portugal records highest May temperature as heatwave intensifies

Portugal has recorded its highest temperature ever for the month of May as a heatwave continues to affect regions south of the Tagus River, the Portuguese Institute for Sea and Atmosphere (IPMA) said last week. – Story on p. 12

Ovitrap index on the rise: Health Bureau chief

Armindo Neves

Macau Health Bureau (SSM) Director Alvis Lo Iek Long announced yesterday that the city's ovitrap index rose year-on-year last month.

The bureau launched its "Public Health Campaign in Buildings" cleanup campaign yesterday at the sitting-out area on Rua Quatro do Bairro lao Hon (祐漢第四街休憩區).

According to a statement released during the launch, the cleanup targets older, low-rise buildings that lack tenants' organisations, condominium owners' management committees or property management companies.

The cleanup involves systematic sanitation inspections and remedial work, primarily covering older districts such as the northern district and the Inner Harbour area.

Dr Lo noted in a speech at the launch ceremony that Macau has recorded seven imported cases of dengue fever and chikungunya fever so far this year. In May, the ovitrap index – which measures the population density of mosquitoes – reached 57.3 percent*, which exceeded both the 52.1 percent



Macau Health Bureau (SSM) Director Alvis Lo Iek Long speaks to reporters at the sitting-out area on Rua Quatro do Bairro lao Hon yesterday.

recorded during the same month last year and the five-year May average of 55.3 percent, indicating a rise in Aedes albopictus mosquito activity.

He noted that getting rid of standing water remains the most essential measure for preventing and controlling mosquito-borne diseases.

The cleanup involves conducting assessments and implementing a tiered response for each building,



A cleaning worker sprays pesticide in back alley in lao Hon district yesterday. – Photos: Armindo Neves

the statement added. High-risk cases are dealt with urgently on the same day, medium-risk cases are followed up within a week, and low-risk cases continue to receive regular inspections, the statement pointed out.

Meanwhile, the bureau said in the statement that it has introduced drones to assist in inspecting hard-to-reach areas such as airwells**,

podium terraces, and back alleys, aiming to improve inspection efficiency.

Dr Lo highlighted that the bureau inspected over 900 buildings in April alone, removing more than four tonnes of waste. Based on those initial assessments, around 1.0 per cent of the buildings were classified as posing a high public health risk, 17 percent as medium risk, and 82

percent as low risk.

Dr Lo urged residents to develop the habit of removing standing water and clutter to help maintain community sanitation.

He also noted that the bureau has set up multiple channels to collect public feedback. In May, officials conducted door-to-door awareness visits to over 15,000 households in collaboration with community associations. Mosquito larvae were discovered in around 5.6 percent of the water containers inspected, Dr Lo said. ■

*At 57.3 percent, it means that out of every 100 traps deployed across the surveyed area, more than 57 of them came back filled with mosquito eggs. An ovitrap index of 57.3 percent is very high and indicates a severe risk of dengue transmission. – Gemini, DeepSeek

**An airwell is an architectural feature designed to bring natural light and fresh air into the interior of a building. It is essentially a vertical shaft or open-air courtyard that runs through the centre or rear of a building, completely open to the sky at the top. – Gemini

Macau Customs Service seizes 2.4 tonnes of cooked chicken worth 50,000 patacas

Armindo Neves

Macau Customs Service officers raided a parallel-trading den in the peninsula's northern district on Friday where they seized 2,400 kilograms of cooked chicken feet worth around 50,000 patacas in total.

According to Saturday's statement, customs officers questioned a 20-year-old local male who ran the den and had hired parallel traders to smuggle cooked chicken feet from Macau to the Chinese mainland.

The suspect faces a fine in compliance with the relevant provisions listed in the External

Trade Law, the statement said.

Moreover, the statement added, the suspect violated the Food Safety Law as the supposedly cooked chicken feet were merely stored at room temperature, adding that the Macau Customs Service has meanwhile transferred the case to the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) for follow-up action.

Meanwhile, as the business premises in question did not possess a valid operating licence, the case has been referred to the Financial Services Bureau (DSF) for follow-up. ■



This handout photo released by the Macau Customs Service on Saturday shows cardboard boxes of chicken feet weighing 2.4 tonnes in total, stored at room temperature, at a parallel trading den in the northern district on Friday.

3rd Macao Int'l Children's Arts Festival to return with performances, exhibitions & family activities

Khalel Vallo

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) said in a statement on Friday that the "3rd Macao International Children's Arts Festival" (MICAF) will be held from June 30 through August, featuring performances, exhibitions, film screenings, workshops, art camps and family-orientated activities aimed at encouraging children and young people to engage with the arts.

According to the statement, this year's festival will offer a diverse programme of local and international productions. Highlights will include the dinosaur-themed puppetry production "Erth's Dinosaur Zoo" by Australia's Erth Visual & Physical Inc., the puppet play "Stone Wolves" by Portugal's Trupe Fandanga and the children's variety show "Peace and Future" by the Chinese mainland's Soong Ching Ling Angel of Peace Art Troupe, the statement noted.

Local productions will include the baby theatre piece "Sounds of WOODerland" by Miracle Lab, the puppet play "Chong Chong's Hamsters", the family musical "Musical Magic Wand V – Journey to the West Wind Music Festival" presented by the Macao Chinese Orchestra (OM) and the dance production "Growing up with Dance 2026 – My City, My Dreams" by the School of Dance of the Macao Conservatory, the statement added.

The festival will also feature visual arts and film programmes, the statement said, underlining that the exhibition "Echo the

Wind Wanderer" by Australian artist Ekokaxi Wang will be held at both the Macau Museum of Art (MAM) in Nape and MGM Cotai's Lion Lobby, while the Macao International Children's Film Festival will present films centred on the themes of growth, communication and cultural heritage, alongside outdoor and community screenings.

Meanwhile, a series of family activities will be held throughout the summer, the statement said. The "Weekend Party with MICAF" programme will take place at weekends from July to August at the Macau Cultural Centre (CCM) Plaza, aiming to feature games, water play activities and art workshops.

Moreover, the "Art Camp" divided into the "Children's Creative Camp" and the "Family Art Camp" allows participants to "experience

art workshops and visit an exhibition in a relaxed and cheerful camp atmosphere, exploring the fun of art from new perspectives", the statement pointed out.

The statement noted that the festival will conclude with the "MICAF Fun Day Arts Carnival" during the final two weekends of August.

Tickets for performances and art camps will go on sale through Enjoy Macao Ticketing (ticketing.enjoymacao.mo) from 10:00 a.m. on June 14, while tickets for the Macao International Children's Film Festival will become available on June 21, also from 10:00 a.m.

Registration for the workshops in the first phase is available through the "Activity Applications" of the Macao One Account (activity.mo.gov.mo/activity-h5/activity-list-web) from 10:00 a.m. on June 5 as well. ■



This undated handout photo provided by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) on Friday shows last year's "MICAF Fun Day Arts Carnival" during the "2nd Macao International Children's Arts Festival" in the Macau Cultural Centre (CCM) Plaza in Nape.

Published since Aug 2004

- Director & Chief Editor – Harald Brüning
- Office Manager – Sally Chong
- Marketing Manager – Kevin Cheung King Lok
- Managing Editor – Maria Cheung Ut Meng
- Editors – Lesley Wells, Johnny Un
- Senior Reporters – Tony Wong, Rui Pastorin
- Reporters – Khalel Vallo, William Chan, Ida Cheong, Armindo Neves
- Chief Graphic Designer – Simon Wang
- Graphic Designer – Colin Zhong
- Administrative Assistants – Ester Mak, Carl Leong
- Printed by Tipografia Welfare Lda., 82-86 Rua dos Pescadores
- Chatbots: DeepSeek, Gemini, Poe
- Wire services – AFP, Xinhua

Macau Weather

CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY INTERVALS. A FEW SHOWERS. FORCE 2 TO 4 SOUTH TO SOUTHWESTERLY WINDS. RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 70% AND 95%.



26°C~31°C

Source: SMG

Sam: 'Macau's strength' to ensure successful APEC tourism summit

Staff Reporter

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai told over three dozen consuls accredited in Macau and other senior local and mainland Chinese officials at a banquet last week that "Macau's strength" would ensure the success of next month's 13th APEC Tourism Ministerial Meeting.

Sam made the remarks in a speech on Thursday at the Garden House of the Grand Lisboa Palace integrated resort in Cotai. The banquet was also attended by the commissioner of the Commission of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR), Bian Lixin, and senior MSAR Government officials, including several policy secretaries.

The 13th APEC Tourism Ministerial Meeting will be hosted by Macau on June 24-28.

According to a statement by the Macau Government Information Bureau (GCS), Sam pointed out that, "under the guidance of the Central People's Government, the MSAR Government is making every effort to advance all preparatory work to ensure the meeting's success, contributing 'Macau's strength' to this year's 'APEC China 2026'



MSAR Chief Executive (front, centre) Sam Hou Fai and Chinese Foreign Affairs Ministry Commissioner Bian Lixin (front, ninth from left) pose for a group photo with consuls accredited to Macau, representatives of the Permanent Secretariat of the Forum for Economic and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (Forum Macao) and senior local and Chinese mainland officials on the sidelines of a briefing on Macau affairs and a banquet on Thursday. - Photo: GCS

series of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meetings".

The banquet was also attended by representatives of the Macau-based Permanent Secretariat of the Forum for Economic and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (Forum Macao).

Sam noted that Macau last hosted an APEC Tourism Ministerial

Meeting in 2014. "This international event is again being held in Macau, fully demonstrating the Central People's Government's trust in Macau and its strong support for the MSAR Government", Sam said, adding: "The event also highlights Macau's role as an important bridge connecting China and the world".

Sam emphasised that "in addition to attending the event, all

delegates will have the opportunity to fully experience Macau's unique charm and heritage as a vibrant blend of Chinese and Western cultures". He also underlined, according to the statement, that as a "World Centre of Tourism and Leisure" - a role given to the MSAR by the Central People's Government after Macau's return to the motherland in December

1999 - "Macau has extensive experience in hosting major international conferences".

Macau's historic centre is a UNESCO World Heritage site. The MSAR is a free port, founding member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), and separate customs territory of the PRC. Last year, Macau welcomed a record 40.07 million visitor arrivals. ■

Melco Resorts & Entertainment Presents

澳門樂團 ORQUESTRA DE MACAU Macao Orchestra

Leia Zhu and Macao Orchestra

Music Director and Principal Conductor of Macao Orchestra Lio Kuokman

Violin Leia Zhu

13 / 06 / 2026
20:00 | Saturday

Venue
Macao Cultural Centre
Grand Auditorium

Tickets
MOP 300 / 250 / 200 / 150

Programme
Sibelius:
Violin Concerto in D minor, Op. 47
Mahler:
Symphony No. 4 in G Major

Ticket Reservation
www.macaoticket.com (853) 2855 5555
For more information about discounts, please visit
www.om-macau.org

澳門樂團 MacaoOrchestra

Soprano Vivian Yau



Filipinos celebrate 24th edition of Pahiyas Macau

Interview by Rui Pastorin

The sound of loud cheers and thumping music filled the Chan Meng Kam Theatre in Iao Hon district yesterday as crowds of Filipinos celebrated yet another lively edition of the traditional San Isidro Pahiyas Festival in Macau, marking its 24th edition in the city.

The colourful Pahiyas (“precious offering”) festival originates from the town of Lucban, Quezon, Philippines, where the largest celebrations take place. The town-wide thanksgiving celebration was created by local farmers to honour a successful harvest, paying tribute to Saint Isidore the Labourer (San Isidro Labrador), the patron saint of farmers, peasants, and those involved in agriculture, as noted by chatbot Gemini.

Its Macau edition began way back in 2003, being organised by the Quezonian Association of Macau. Various editions have normally been hosted outdoors, notably in Praça da Amizade, commonly known as Sintra Square, while previous events had also taken place at Lago Sai Van opposite the Macau Tower Convention and Entertainment Centre, as well as the theatre.

This edition was organised by the association in collaboration with the “United Macau Skeptron Society”. The programme again started with a Mass and an ensuing procession in the morning, which this year was held in a local church, Quezonian Association of Macau President Wabbett Cabungcal told the *Post* yesterday

With this year’s event held at the theatre, Cabungcal told the *Post* yesterday that the unpredictability of the weather situation made hosting the event indoors more viable, speaking from experience in previous years, as well as with yesterday morning’s unexpected torrential rain being an example. “We had to do it indoors. We are lucky if we have sunny days” during the time that the festival takes place in Macau, which is within the last week of May, Cabungcal said.

“Now we are in the 24th year”, Cabungcal said, calling this particular moment “monumental” and “historical” over the annual event’s two-decade history in Macau. To him, its preservation and continuation is of utmost importance, also relating it to the pride of Filipinos in Macau. With this in mind, Cabungcal said, in high spirits, that the event will definitely keep going.

Other event highlights included a variety of performances, which included those by the Indonesian and Vietnamese communities in addition to various Filipino performers, and a pageant or “parikitan”* featuring contestants clad in elaborate, colourful costumes inspired by the festival and its traditions. The pageant particularly drew loud cheers from the audience as contestants stepped on stage to showcase their costumes and performances at the theatre filled with excited spectators.

*The word comes from the root word rikit (meaning beauty or loveliness) and translates closely to a competition of “prettiness” or “beautification” (pagandahan) in the Southern Tagalog region. It serves as both a high-fashion beauty pageant and a celebration of local ingenuity. - Gemini



Contestants for yesterday’s parikitan at the 24th edition of the San Isidro Pahiyas Festival in Macau showcase their costumes and deliver on-stage performances at the Chan Meng Kam Theatre in Iao Hon district yesterday afternoon. – Photos: Rui Pastorin



Quezonian Association of Macau President Wabbett Cabungcal poses with participants of yesterday’s pageant at Chan Meng Kam Theatre.



HK Comic Con inaugurated with celebrity guests, artists & cosplay attractions

Khalel Vallo in Hong Kong

The inaugural “Hong Kong Comic Con 2026” concluded yesterday after a three-day run at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre in Wan Chai, attracting visitors, cosplayers and pop culture enthusiasts from Hong Kong and neighbouring cities including Macau and Shenzhen.

Held from Friday through yesterday, the convention brought together comic book creators, entertainment personalities, collectors, and fans.

Hong Kong icon Louis Koo Tin-lok, the convention’s official ambassador, officiated at the opening ceremony on Friday morning. Addressing the ceremony, Koo reflected on the launch of the city’s first Comic Con. “This year’s Comic Con is the first in Hong Kong”, Koo underlined, noting that organisers had spent the past few months preparing for the event and learning the process step by step.

He added: “I hope that this year’s Comic Con can help Hong Kong become a better city”, encouraging attendees to share their feedback so future editions could continue to improve. The exhibition floor featured a variety of themed attractions and merchandise booths, including a Star Wars display, a large figure of Son Goku, collectibles such as Funko Pop!



Hong Kong icon Louis Koo Tin-lok addresses the inaugural three-day “Hong Kong Comic Con 2026” opening ceremony at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre in Wan Chai on Friday.



(From left to right) Daniel Logan, Mads Mikkelsen, Byeon Woo-seok, Louis Koo Tin-lok, Christopher Lloyd, Norman Reedus, and Giancarlo Esposito pose during Friday’s opening ceremony. – Photos: Khalel Vallo

figures, video game merchandise and an artist’s alley showcasing international comic creators.

Among the featured artists were Bob Layton, the “definitive artist” of Marvel Comics’ Iron Man; Stephen Segovia, known for his works on Marvel and DC Comics; David Angelo Roman, recognised for work related to Star Wars and Rick and Morty projects; and Agnes Garbowska, known for her contributions to My Little Pony comics.

The event also hosted several international film and television

personalities, featuring Hannibal’s Mads Mikkelsen, Back to the Future’s Christopher Lloyd, The Walking Dead’s Norman Reedus, Stranger Things’ Jamie Campbell Bower, Harry Potter’s Katie Leung, Breaking Bad’s Giancarlo Esposito, Star Wars’ Daniel Logan, and Lovely Runner’s Byeon Woo-seok.

Cosplayers from across the region also

participated in the event, contributing to the atmosphere alongside exhibitions, merchandise displays and fan activities.

As the first event of its kind in Hong Kong, Comic Con 2026 drew a mix of international guests, artists and fans, highlighting growing interest in comics, film, gaming and cosplay culture in the region. ■

Stay tuned for an upcoming page 4.

2 brands of bottled water found to contain enterococci: IAM

Armando Neves

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) said in a statement on Friday that two bottled water brands, one from the United Kingdom and the other from South Korea, were found to contain enterococci*.

According to the statement, the two problematic products are “Still Scottish Mountain Water”, branded “Marks & Spencer”, with a capacity of 750 ml and a best-before date of December 2026, and “LOTTE ICIS Natural Mineral Water 8.0”, branded “Lotte”, with a capacity of 2 litres and a best-before date of September 22, 2027.

The statement also said that according to the testing data, both product samples were found each to contain a colony-forming unit (CFU) of enterococci per 250 millilitres, which does not comply with Macau’s General Guidelines for Hygiene and

Quality of Bottled Drinking Water.

In the statement, the bureau urges consumers who have purchased products from the affected batches, whether through online shopping, purchasing agents or other channels, to stop drinking them immediately. The trade has been ordered to cease the supply and sale of the affected products without delay, the statement said. ■

*Enterococci are a genus of Gram-positive, facultative anaerobic bacteria that typically occur in pairs (diplococci) or short chains. They are part of the normal intestinal flora of humans and many animals. Enterococci can cause healthcare-associated infections, e.g., urinary tract infections, bacteraemia, endocarditis, wound infections, especially in immunocompromised or hospitalised patients. - DeepSeek



This undated handout photo downloaded last night from the Marks & Spencer online supermarket shows the problematic product that was found to contain enterococci.



This undated handout photo downloaded last night from the Lotte Chilsung Mall online supermarket shows the problematic product that was found to contain enterococci.

Healthcare Subsidy Scheme 2026

Healthcare vouchers now usable in both Macao and Guangdong Province Let’s work together to safeguard health and well-being

Eligibility and period of use

- Beneficiaries: Holders of a valid or renewable Macao SAR Permanent Resident Identity Card as of 31st May 2027
- Amount: MOP700 (distributed to each beneficiary in the form of electronic healthcare vouchers).
- Validity period: 2 years (from 1st June 2026 to 31st May 2028)
- Eligible transferees: The beneficiaries’ spouse, parents and children who hold a Macao SAR Permanent Resident Identity Card

Use of vouchers

In Macao

- Beneficiaries can use the electronic healthcare vouchers simply by showing their electronic identity on the Macao One Account, without the need to present a physical identity card.
- If a beneficiary does not have or cannot use the Macao One Account, they may still use the vouchers by presenting their Macao SAR Permanent Resident Identity Card.

In Guangdong Province

- When seeking medical attention at an enrolled healthcare establishment in Guangdong Province, beneficiaries must use their Macao One Account in order to spend the healthcare vouchers.

Electronic healthcare vouchers can be used in both Macao and Guangdong Province. For health professionals to join the Scheme in Guangdong Province:

- They must be health professionals (Macao residents) who have been approved to join the Healthcare Subsidy Scheme in Macao.
- Their practising clinic or outpatient department must be established solely or jointly by Macao residents, and comply with relevant Mainland regulations.

Transfer of vouchers

Transfer can be made through Macao One Account, self-service kiosks or the Health Bureau’s website/ mobile app. It may also be assisted by the health professional providing care or the staff of the Support Centre.

Enquiry

Website
www.vs.gov.mo

Hotline
2822 5050

Facsimile
2822 3030

E-mail
vs@ssm.gov.mo

澳門特別行政區政府衛生局
Serviços de Saúde do Governo da Região Administrativa Especial de Macau

Crowds anticipate the main fight of UFC FIGHT NIGHT. – Photos: Rui Pastorin



Song beats Figueiredo at UFC FIGHT NIGHT

Attendance reaches 12,647 spectators

Rui Pastorin

The Chinese mainland's Song Yadong defeated Brazil's Deiveson Figueiredo in Saturday's action-packed UFC FIGHT NIGHT at the 16,000-seat Galaxy Arena, making the Brazilian tap while in a guillotine chokehold right as the second round of their bantamweight bout was coming to a close.

While both fighters had their fans, the outpouring of support from Song's fans echoed across Macau's largest indoor arena as he made his way into the Octagon.

Going toe-to-toe, the first round between Heilongjiang's Song, the No. 5 UFC bantamweight and title contender, and Figueiredo, the No. 7 UFC bantamweight and former flyweight champion, started off with careful and calculated strikes and takedowns, with several exciting close calls, the cheers of "Song Yadong!" and "Jiayou"* echoing periodically for the crowd's favourite.

While the excitement continued in the second round, just towards the end, Figueiredo went for a takedown, but "The Kung Fu Kid" gained the upper hand, beating the skilled grappler by submission and bringing Song's fight record to 23-9-1 (1 NC-"No Contest").

At the post-fight press conference, Song told the media that he was proud of his win by guillotine. "I did a lot in the sparring, but I finally did it in the fight. I'm so proud of myself", he said.

The main fight was not the only bout that drew excitement as the five other fights in the main card also had notable highlights, including the co-main fight: The light heavyweight slugfest between Anhui's Zhang Mingyang and Alonzo Menifield from

Dallas, Texas. In a match with much built-up excitement and collective support as Zhang entered the arena, the "Mountain Tiger" would be defeated via TKO near the end of the first round, leaving fans disappointed, yet still supportive as he exited the arena.

The first match of the main card, meanwhile, was that of mainland China's Su Mudaerji and US fighter Alex Perez, which was ruled a no contest due to an accidental foul after the latter was kicked in the groin during the second round, vomiting into a bucket and unable to continue. This left many, as observed by the *Post*, upset with the ruling.

The ensuing fights included the victory by unanimous decision for Australia's Jake Matthews against Guyanese Carlston Harris, Japan's Kai Asakura's first round finish against Cameron Smotherman from the US via TKO (Technical Knockout) at 1 minute 50 seconds, a swift TKO further topped by Russia's Sergei Pavlovich, who knocked out Brazil's Tallison Teixeira at just 39 seconds into the first round of their heavyweight bout.

The preliminary fights leading up to the main card were also not without their moments, among which were the impressive performances of UFC veteran and No. 14 ranked the US's Angela Hill and Xiong JIANGNAN, representing Indonesia's Bali. In the end, Hill claimed victory by unanimous decision.

UFC FIGHT NIGHT's attendance reaches 12,647

Addressing the media after yesterday's main fight, Senior Vice President and Head of Asia for the



Macau winner of UFC FIGHT NIGHT Song Yadong from Heilongjiang addresses the media during Saturday night's post-fight press conference at Galaxy Arena.

UFC, Kevin Chang, said that Saturday event's attendance reached 12,647, with tickets, like in 2024, sold out.

Performance of the night bonuses went to Kai and Song, while the fight of the night was Zhang vs. Menifield. Chang also highlighted the performances of Kai and Song, whose victory against the accomplished Figueiredo was an achievement that also showed what he can do.

Moreover, Chang noted in response to a reporter's question that the China market was "very, very important", noting metrics such as fanbase size, social media followers, trends that all ranked highly. "Just the scale of the country, the number of fans and how passionate they are, all of those things contribute to that", also adding that the UFC believes that the quantity and quality of the athletes will also take this all to the next level. ■

* "Jiayou (加油)" is a ubiquitous Chinese expression of encouragement and support. Directly translated, it means "Add Oil". In Cantonese, it is pronounced "Ga Yauh". – Wikipedia/MPD

Sam 'distressed' by boy's zebra crossing death, vows to prevent similar tragedies

Continued from p.1

Reading out Sam's message during Friday evening's press conference, Wong quoted the chief executive as saying that the incident was "deeply distressing" and heartbreaking. He also said that Sam said in his message that he attached great importance to the accident right after it happened, after which he "immediately" ordered the Secretariat for Security to coordinate the respective public security forces to swiftly handle the situation at the scene, and to coordinate the respective law enforcement agencies in investigating and handling the case thoroughly and rigorously in accordance with the law.

According to Wong, Sam also told the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) to convey the government's condolences and deep sympathies to the boy's family.

Wong quoted Sam as underlining that since the accident occurred, the local government and its DSEDJ have been deeply concerned about the emotional well-being and circumstances of the boy's family. According to Wong, Sam has coordinated the DSEDJ and the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) to make every possible effort to provide them with all necessary support, accompanying them through this difficult time.

In his message conveyed through Wong, Sam also said that he has instructed the respective public entities to vigorously take all necessary measures to prevent similar tragedies from occurring again.

According to Wong, Sam conveyed his most sincere sympathies to the boy's family, with the earnest hope that they take the utmost care of themselves.

In the wake of Wednesday's fatal accident on a zebra crossing, which occurred in Toi San district, members across civil society have slammed what they regard as poorly designed locations of some zebra crossings across the city. They also criticised the government's perceived failure to advance legislation on amendments to the Road Traffic Law, the current version of which is widely perceived to lag behind the city's urban development.

Since its enactment in 2007, the Road Traffic Law has never been amended.

During Friday's press conference, Wong also pledged that the government is aiming to consult the public as soon as possible about its proposed amendments to the Road Traffic Law.

The legislature passed the outline of a government-initiated bill to set up a new Road Traffic Law to replace the current one during a plenary session in April 2024, after which the bill was passed to one of the legislature's standing committees for an article-by-article review between legislators and government officials.

However, by the time the normal operation period of the previous-term legislature terminated in August last year, the government had not submitted its final draft version of the bill to the committee for final review. Consequently, the bill was then invalidated, meaning that the government – if deciding to legislate a new Road Traffic Law in the future – will have to submit a new bill to the legislature.

During Friday's press conference, Wong said that the government initially planned to relaunch its legislative process in 2028 for a new Road Traffic Law. In the wake of the fatal accident, Wong said, Sam has instructed the government's Secretariat for Transport and Public Works portfolio to review its schedule on the matter. The government has now decided "not to wait until 2028" to launch its legislative process for a new Road Traffic Law, Wong said.

Wong noted that during the Road Traffic Law bill's review between the government and the legislature last year, civil society's consensus still could not be reached on the matter so that the bill "unluckily" became a lapsed bill eventually.

Meanwhile, speaking to local media on Saturday, Ho Man Fai, principal of Lin Fong Pou Chai School, said that considering the hot weather that makes it easy for the snacks left on the fatal accident site's pavement to go off, as well as concerning pedestrian safety, and the need for public mourning, his school had asked government municipal workers to transfer the floral tributes and other items from the pavement to the nearby Kiang Wu Funeral Parlour, following a discussion on the matter with the boy's family.

Ho said that residents wishing to leave floral tributes and other items can visit the funeral parlour instead.

According to local media reports, Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) Director Kong Chi Meng and Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) President Wilson Hon Wai went to Lin Fong Pou Chai School on Friday to meet the boy's family. The two officials handed a sympathy letter to the family on behalf of Sam and conveyed the government's profound condolences and deep sympathies to the bereaved family and their relatives. ■

4.8 million check into hotels in Jan-April, up 1.9 pct

Staff Reporter

Macau's hotels recorded 4.86 million guests in the first four months of this year, a year-on-year growth of 1.9 percent, the Statistics and Census Bureau (DSEC) announced in a statement last week.

The number of foreign guests rose by 13.8 percent to 453,000 between January and April, accounting for 9.3 percent of the total number of guests. Some 90.7 percent of Macau's hotel guests were compatriots from the Chinese mainland, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) and China's Taiwan region.

In April, the number of hotel guests dipped by 0.8 percent year-on-year to 1.86 million. Guests from the Chinese mainland made up 71.1 percent of the total number of guests. Last month, South Koreans (31,000) and Thai (12,000) made up the hotel industry's top two international guest segments.

In the first four months, guest rooms' average occupancy rate increased by 2.2 percentage points year-on-year to 91.8 percent.

According to other hotel industry data released by the bureau previously, Macau's 147 hotels – including 39

five-star and 44 budget hotels – comprised 45,129 rooms and 119,762 beds at the end of the first quarter.

In the first four months, Macau recorded 14.65 million visitor arrivals, a year-on-year growth of 13.1 percent, according to a previous announcement by the bureau.

Hotel guests accounted for 32.8 percent of all visitor arrivals in the first four months of the year, DSEC figures show.

At the end of the first quarter, Macau's population amounted to 688,100, according to official demographics. ■

2026 cash handouts to start on July 1

Continued from p.1

According to the 2026 wealth-sharing programme, those not staying in Macau due to one of eight officially defined reasons can submit their applications between June 15 and December 31, 2029 requesting that they be officially exempted from the 183-day rule in order to benefit from this year's wealth-sharing programme, namely:

1) Those studying for a higher education degree anywhere outside Macau officially recognised by the respective countries or regions' authorities.

2) Those undergoing hospitalisation anywhere outside Macau.

3) Seniors aged at least 65 living in the Chinese mainland, or those under 65 living in the mainland because of the need to receive non-hospital care, palliative care or rehabilitation there.

4) Those working anywhere outside Macau for local employers registered with the Macau government's Social Security Fund (FSS).

5) Those working anywhere outside Macau because of the need to support their family members living in Macau or Hengqin (the Hengqin rule has been newly added this year).

6) Those performing official duties anywhere outside Macau.

7) Those working in the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, or studying there either for a higher education degree or being enrolled in a school, or merely living there.

8) Those working in one of the nine mainland cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA).

Moreover, Wong said that according to the 2026 wealth-sharing programme, three special groups of Macau residents who stayed in Macau for less than 183 days last year but do not meet any of the eight reasons will also be eligible to receive this year's cash handouts, without having to submit an application, namely:

1) Those aged below 22 by the end of last year but whose father or mother is eligible to receive the 2026 cash handout.

2) Those who were eligible last year to receive a monthly allowance for those with disabilities issued by the Social Security Fund (FSS).

3) Those who were eligible last year to receive an annual subsidy for those with disabilities issued by the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS).

Those who apply to be officially exempted from the 183-day requirement can submit the required documents via the Macau One Account e-government app, the scheme's dedicated website, or at one of the various service centres. ■

China-Canada ties have set sail again: Wang Yi

OTTAWA – Visiting Foreign Minister Wang Yi said on Friday that the bilateral relationship has set sail again.

Wang made the remarks during talks with his Canadian counterpart Anita Anand.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, said that under the strategic guidance of the leaders of both nations, exchanges and cooperation across various fields have fully resumed, with the main economic and trade concerns of both sides having been properly resolved.

He voiced hope of working with the Canadian side to explore the path for advancing the China-Canada new

strategic partnership and make good preparations for Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney's upcoming trip to China to attend the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Economic Leaders' Meeting, so as to ensure that bilateral relations move forward along a sound, stable and sustainable track.

Wang said that the ups and downs of China-Canada relations over the years have provided the most important revelation that the two sides should commit to mutual respect, seeking common ground while shelving differences, upholding strategic autonomy, and win-win cooperation.

Wang said that China is ready to work with Canada to deepen cooperation in fields such as energy,

finance and law enforcement, and that Canada is welcome to participate in the China International Import Expo as the country of honor.

For her part, Anand said that Canada attaches great importance to its relations with China and that Canada firmly adheres to the one-China policy and has set a goal of increasing exports to China by 50 percent by 2030.

During their talks, the two sides agreed to establish a strategic dialogue mechanism between Chinese and Canadian foreign ministers and restart political and security consultations between the foreign ministries, as well as the high-level national security and rule of law dialogue.

— Xinhua



Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney (right) meets with Foreign Minister Wang Yi, a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee in Ottawa, Canada, on Friday. — Xinhua

Japan, Philippines should end their illegal, invalid maritime delimitation plan

Commentary

BEIJING – Japan and the Philippines' announcement to start talks on the delimitation of their so-called exclusive economic zone and continental shelf is a sensitive political move that infringes upon China's maritime rights and interests and undermines regional stability. This unjustified and unconstructive action should be corrected immediately.

Such a unilateral move clearly violates international law. The waters that Japan and the Philippines seek to delimit are closely tied to the maritime rights and interests of Taiwan and its surrounding waters, thus involving China's sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction.

Global basic norms clearly stipulate that a bilateral deal must not infringe upon a third party's lawful rights and interests, particularly in areas with unresolved sovereignty and maritime jurisdiction disputes. This principle is also clearly reflected in the spirit of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

No country has the right to make arrangements concerning China's maritime rights and interests without China's approval.

In full awareness of China's position, Japan and the Philippines have unilaterally pushed forward with the so-called delimitation negotiations. This is not an ordinary act of maritime coordination, but a move that substantially encroaches upon China's rights and interests.

Their so-called delimitation plan is nothing more than castles in the sand. On the one hand, the maritime entitlements of some northern Philippine islands and their relevant waters have long been complicated by historical factors. The maritime claims that the Philippines has extended outward and taken for granted are by no means free of dispute.

On the other hand, Japan's Nansei Islands, and the Ryukyu issue in particular, carry profound historical complexities. The nature, scope and legal effect of post-WWII arrangements, US trusteeship, and the subsequent transfer of administrative rights have long been sensitive topics in international politics and historical research. Japan cannot simply erase relevant historical and legal disputes through unilateral administrative control or existing domestic legislation.

While their statement ostensibly invokes

international law and negotiation-based solutions, it makes a veiled reference to so-called arbitration and related precedents. This exposes the entangled political motives underlying their position and reveals an apparent attempt to shape public opinion.

Japan has been working to break free from the constraints of its "exclusively defense-oriented policy," while the Philippines has consistently engaged external forces under the guise of maritime issues to bolster security cooperation of a confrontational nature.

Their high-profile announcement of maritime delimitation talks at this juncture is essentially a calculated attempt to hype up so-called regional threats, seeking to generate fresh narratives to justify their respective military and security agendas.

Moreover, both countries have a long record of misconduct at sea. Japan is involved in multiple disputes over its maritime claims. The Philippines has been plagued by deficiencies in marine environmental protection, coastal ecological restoration, maritime law enforcement, as well as port, shipping and marine infrastructure governance. Rather than bridging these gaps, it repeatedly resorts to political rhetoric,

leveraging maritime issues to advance its own agenda.

Efforts to resolve maritime disputes should be based on genuine respect for historical facts and international law, and should be conducted through inclusive, prudent and good-faith dialogue.

Any approach that bypasses stakeholders, harms the interests of third parties, or serves geopolitical competition is not a proper way to settle disputes. Attempts to politicize, internationalize, or escalate antagonism in regional issues will further increase the risk of miscalculation and undermine regional stability.

What countries in the Asia-Pacific truly need is open cooperation, proper dispute management, and a focus on development. This is certainly not about the deliberate creation of new friction points, or the pursuit of private gains at the expense of China's legitimate rights and interests, including Taiwan.

Japan and the Philippines should respond to China's concerns in an earnest way, immediately cease their wrongful actions, and return to the right track for maintaining regional peace and stability. — Xinhua

Survivors advise rescuers in search for last two stuck in Laos cave

VIENTIANE – From their shared hospital room, several survivors freed from a semi-submerged cave in Laos after more than a week underground are advising rescuers on how to find the last two missing men believed to be trapped even deeper inside.

Rescuers, including foreign cave divers, said yesterday they were devising a risky search for the two men and gaining insights about the narrow, flooded passageways from the survivors – one of whom spoke of “waiting to die” in the depths of the cave.

A Laotian rescue group said the information on the cave system from the hospitalised men was “considered substantial” and “being used to prepare the search plan for the remaining two people”.

“The hope is that today’s mission will locate both remaining victims,” the group wrote yesterday on social media.

Five men were found alive on Wednesday, huddling in a tight shaft around 300 metres from the mouth of the cave in a remote mountainous area of central Xaysomboun province.

They were among seven stranded in the cave by flash floods nearly two weeks ago as they searched for gold, state media reports said.

Rescue divers extracted the first man on Friday, and four more found their own way out on Saturday, after teams delivered them food and medicine and had for days pumped water from the cave, providing them with an easier exit.

Their emergence prompted emotional scenes as tearful relatives and rescuers ran to embrace them just before they were helped to tents for medical checks, videos from rescue groups showed.

Zero visibility

In their shared hospital room, the five survivors rested on simple



This screen grab made from handout video footage taken on Saturday, and provided by Adisak Wongsoraya, shows two men (centre left and centre right, with head lamp) being hugged after they were rescued from a semi-submerged cave in Laos' central Xaysomboun province, northeast of the capital Vientiane. – AFP

metal cots with thin mattresses, lined side by side, footage aired on state television showed.

They were receiving medical treatment and “in good condition”, Malaysian diver Lee Kian Lie said yesterday.

Rescuers had interviewed the men about how the deeper part of the cave looked, he said in a message to AFP.

“We will continue to search based on the info we have and perhaps we (will be) able to get to the other two,” said Lee, who joined the rescue operation on Friday.

The four who left the cave on Saturday, he added, had “walked out themselves because the water (level had) been lowered”.

One of the four, a man identified by Laotian state media as Laen, confirmed that they had managed to escape through areas “where water was already pumped out”.

But before the rescue divers found them, despair was setting in, he said in an interview with Lao National Radio from the hospital yesterday.

“We spent three days searching for a way out, but we couldn’t find

it. And it was hopeless,” Laen said.

“I said if there is no diving team coming to help, there would be zero percent chance of survival. We were just waiting to die.”

The man rescued on Friday – identified only as Meud – said in a video shared by a rescue group that the two missing men had entered the cave several days before the others and had descended much further.

The search for the last two yesterday was focused on a tight, inundated passage believed to lie beyond the area where the five survivors were found, according to Japanese diver Yoshitaka Isaji.

“This submerged passageway is extremely narrow and practically unpassable unless you change your posture. Imagine the space as narrow as a dresser drawer,” Isaji wrote on social media, adding that the muddy water meant “visibility is zero”.

Rescuers were still pumping water from the cave and trying to block more from flowing in, he added.

“Given the enormous risk, diving would only be a last resort.”

– AFP

5 killed, 3 missing in WWII bomb explosion in E Indonesia

JAKARTA – Five people were killed and three others went missing after a bomb exploded in Indonesia’s eastern Papua province yesterday, local police said.

The blast occurred in the afternoon in a densely populated village, causing severe damage to nearby homes, the police told local media.

The search operations for the missing were suspended overnight due to concerns over possible unexploded ordnance at the site, police added.

A leftover World War II bomb caused the explosion. Authorities have cordoned off the area and warned residents to stay away until it is declared safe. Search and recovery efforts are expected to resume today.

Japan invaded Indonesia in early 1942, causing immense destruction during its occupation that lasted over three years. Significant quantities of wartime explosives still linger as a safety hazard in various parts of the Southeast Asian country. – Xinhua

Indonesia-born giant panda cub makes public debut



Rio, the first giant panda cub born in Indonesia, is pictured at Taman Safari Indonesia in Bogor, south of Jakarta, on Saturday. – Xinhua

JAKARTA – Taman Safari Indonesia (TSI) officially introduced Rio, the first giant panda cub born in the country, to the public on Saturday in Bogor, south of Jakarta.

According to a TSI statement, the debut follows a comprehensive evaluation by TSI’s Life Science and Veterinary teams, in collaboration with experts from the China Conservation and Research Center for the Giant Panda. The teams confirmed that Rio has reached all necessary physical and behavioral milestones.

Born on November 27, 2025, weighing just 200 grams, Rio has developed into a healthy 11 kg male at 184 days old. “He is now able to walk independently, interact actively with his mother, Hu Chun, and has begun consuming bamboo shoots as part of a carefully

managed nutritional transition under continuous professional supervision,” the statement said.

To ensure his well-being, the TSI is managing Rio’s public appearances through gradual, controlled timeframes in line with international animal welfare standards.

As the only giant panda cub born outside China in the last three years, “his birth represents a significant contribution to international conservation collaboration while further strengthening Indonesia’s role within the global giant panda conservation network,” the statement said.

“This achievement also marks an important milestone in the development of ex-situ conservation programs in Indonesia,” it added.

– Xinhua

N Korea ‘not keen’ on engaging with US, South: Singapore FM

SINGAPORE – North Korea does not seem keen on diplomacy with Washington and Seoul, instead choosing to strengthen self-reliance and military deterrence, Singapore’s foreign minister has said after a rare trip to the politically isolated nation.

Pyongyang has repeatedly shunned peace overtures from the South Korean government while throwing its backing behind Russia in its invasion of Ukraine.

The comments by Singapore’s top diplomat Vivian Balakrishnan late on Thursday followed his first visit in eight years to Pyongyang, marking half a century of diplomatic ties.

“At this point in time, they... appear to not be keen on any engagement externally, either with America or even with the ROK,”

Balakrishnan told local media in Seoul, using South Korea’s official acronym.

“Instead, they are focusing on building up their own self-reliance as well as their own military deterrence,” he said after the two-day working visit to the nuclear-armed state.

In recent months, North Korea has stepped up its invective against the South, labelling it the “most hostile state” and cutting all references to uniting the divided peninsula from its constitution.

Balakrishnan said he too had observed a hardening in North Korea’s stance on unification.

“Right now (North Korea) is not looking for any opportunities for talks or engagement in a significant way,” he said.

Despite almost no trade between the two countries, ties between

Singapore and North Korea remain cordial, and Balakrishnan said he had invited Pyongyang to attend a regional forum hosted by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The Singaporean official also posted a video on Facebook saying “Pyongyang is a modern, clean, well planned city. Continued to make significant progress since I last visited eight years ago.”

“Busy streets, more cars on the roads, and many new buildings and developments,” he said.

Balakrishnan urged “strategic patience” with North Korea.

“Don’t make things worse, don’t aggravate issues, but look with a longer-term horizon for opportunities to be helpful or to open channels of communication,” he said. – AFP



Buddhist monks and devotees participate in Vesak celebrations in front of Borobudur Temple, the world’s largest Buddhist monument and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, in Magelang, Central Java, Indonesia, yesterday. Vesak commemorates the birth, enlightenment and death of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, traditionally believed to have occurred during the full moon of the Vesakha month in the ancient Indian lunar calendar. – AFP

Two decades later, impacts from Indonesia mud volcano linger

Andre Yuris

SIDOARJA – Harwati clasped her hands and offered a prayer on the edge of a sludge lake on the Indonesian island of Java, as dozens of residents gathered to mark two decades since mud volcano eruptions began displacing thousands.

On May 29, 2006, the earth in the Sidoarjo district of East Java province opened up, ejecting pungent, steaming hot mud that swallowed villages and factories.

Thirteen people died when an underground gas pipeline in the disaster zone exploded.

The eruptions, which continue to occur, destroyed at least a dozen villages and have displaced tens of thousands of people.

Harwati said the gathering, held on Friday to mark two decades since the disaster, was organised to remind the government that residents are still feeling the impact of the mudflow.

“Even though presidents change, we still hope (the government will) provide justice for us,” the 50-year-old told AFP on Saturday, insisting that the disaster was “far” from over.

She demanded the government conduct a thorough examination of the mudflow’s impacts on the health of nearby residents, saying many locals have suffered from cancers after the incident.

An area of over 600 hectares was swallowed by the mud, according to the government, as efforts to plug it, including with huge concrete balls, have proved ineffective.

The disaster forced Muhammad Irsyad to leave his village in 2012, as he could no longer tolerate pollution that seeped into the well his family relied on for cooking and bathing.

“I was angry when I wanted to take a bath because when we shower, my eyes got stung as soon as the water hits it,” Irsyad, 62, told AFP.

Two decades since the disaster, Irsyad said he was still “rearranging” his life, with his family surviving on income earned from their food stall and drinking water sales.

Irsyad’s wife Siti Chusniawati said she was “sad” to relocate to a new place, but added that the family had little choice.

“It was tough, but whether we



Residents affected by the Lapindo mudflow gather with environmental activists to offer prayers at the embankment of the mud volcano area, marking 20 years since a gas exploration accident triggered a mud flow that inundated more than a dozen villages and permanently displaced tens of thousands of people in Porong, Sidoarjo, East Java province on Saturday. – AFP

want it or not, we just go on day by day, trying to be able to adapt with this new circumstance,” the 48-year-old said.

‘Not finished’

Independent studies alternate blame between oil and gas company PT Lapindo Brantas, which was drilling in the area at the time, and an earthquake that struck two days

earlier about 260 kilometres away.

Lapindo – part of a business empire controlled by Indonesia’s powerful Bakrie family – was eventually ordered to compensate victims, but payments took years, triggering angry protests.

The government eventually intervened and loaned the company the funds to expedite the remaining payments.

Irsyad called the use of public

money to pay for damages following the disaster an “injustice”. He said the company should take responsibility.

Lapindo, which has since changed its name to Minarak Brantas Gas, did not immediately respond to an AFP request for comment, but the firm previously said investigations “determined that no correlation could be proven between the drilling activities and the mud eruption”.

Environmental groups have found that groundwater near in area has been polluted following the disaster, causing illnesses for locals, said Melky Nahar, a coordinator of NGO Mining Advocacy Network (JATAM).

“After two decades, the destruction over the health, environment and base of production of people... are not finished,” he said.

Irsyad, who moved to his current home some four kilometres away from his old one, said he told his friend that he wished to be buried in his old village.

“So my child and grandchild will look for me there. And from there they possibly will have a question: ‘why grandfather was buried here?’” – AFP

Sri Lanka’s top monk suspended over alleged child sex abuse

COLOMBO – Sri Lanka’s Buddhist hierarchy suspended on Saturday a senior monk accused of sexually abusing an 11-year-old girl, in a high-profile case that has shocked the religiously conservative nation.

In a rare disciplinary move, 71-year-old Pallegama Hemarathana was stripped of his responsibilities as the chief custodian of a highly venerated ficus grown from a sapling of a tree believed to have sheltered the Buddha.

“The Council of Monks of the Malwatte Chapter decided today (Saturday) to suspend Ven. Hemarathana until the conclusion of the legal proceedings against him,” a statement issued by the chief priests said.

Police arrested Hemarathana on May 9 over allegations that he had sexually abused an 11-year-old girl in 2022 at the Jaya Sri Maha Bodhi temple in Anuradhapura, 200

kilometres north of Colombo.

The monk has since been granted bail while a court has barred him from travelling abroad.

The temple draws thousands of people daily who pay homage at the tree Buddhists believe is closely connected to the same ficus that sheltered the Buddha when he attained enlightenment.

Hemarathana’s suspension came on the same day Sri Lanka celebrated Vesak, the anniversary of the Buddha’s birth, enlightenment and passing.

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

In a separate case, a group of 22 monks arrested in April with 110 kilograms of cannabis have remained in custody pending prosecution, but not suspended from the priesthood. – AFP

Blast in rebel-held Myanmar kills dozens: rescuers

YANGON – A blast in northern Myanmar killed dozens of people yesterday, two rescue workers said, with rebels controlling the region saying it was caused by the accidental detonation of mining explosives.

One first responder in Shan state’s Namhkan district, where the blast occurred, said 46 people were killed, including children, and more than 70 others were injured.

Another rescuer said 59 people were killed in total, with both speaking on condition of anonymity due to security concerns.

Myanmar has been mired in a civil war since the military grabbed power in a 2021 coup, with the

armed forces fighting an array of pro-democracy guerrillas and powerful ethnic minority armed groups.

The Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), one of the country’s most powerful ethnic minority factions, said the “accidental explosion” of stored explosives used in mining and stone quarrying detonated at around 12:00 p.m. local time yesterday in Shan state’s Namhkan township, killing “many local villagers”.

It did not give an exact toll.

The TNLA said in a statement that the explosives belonged to its economic department, and the exact cause of the blast was under investigation. – AFP

Australian researchers teach brain cells to play ‘Doom’

Janelle Meager with Sophia Poole in Sydney

MELBOURNE – Australian researchers have trained lab-grown brain cells on a silicon computer chip to play the nineties shooter game “Doom” and say they are just scratching the surface of what the neurons could be capable of doing.

It’s the science-fiction work of biotech boffins at Cortical Labs, who researched and developed the technology that harnesses the workings of the brain’s networking system.

Each so-called “biological computer” contains around 200,000 living human brain cells, grown from stem cells that were harvested from blood donations.

Having mastered the simple computer game “Pong”, where a paddle is moved up and down to send a ball across a screen, the brain cells have moved on to bigger things.

Initially, the neurons were at the “level of a beginner who’s never played a video game before,” Alon Loeffler, Cortical Labs’ senior application scientist, told AFP.

“Doom” involves a chaotic 3D game-world where the user is required to explore its surroundings and dispatch enemies – no easy task for a clump of cells.

“They were walking into walls a lot, shooting the walls, turning around, doing funny things like that,” Loeffler said.

“And then eventually they started targeting the enemies more regularly and correctly.”

It’s not the cleanest execution, however. One demon takes several attempts to slaughter, with shots fired in multiple directions before the target is hit.

But the mind-bending research proves the neurons can adapt to stimuli in real time and complete goal-directed learning, Cortical Labs say.

‘Scratching the surface’

The researchers converted the digital environment in “Doom” into patterns of electrical signals the neurons on the chip could understand.

When an enemy appears, specific electrodes stimulate the neurons on the special chip called a CL1, causing them to react.

Different patterns of neuron activity produce specific responses, such as firing the gun or moving left or right.

Researchers monitor the electrical activity of the neurons from a computer screen connected to the CL1, represented by thousands of tiny dots.

From this data, the team adjusts their input to influence and train the neuron’s activity.



This photo taken on May 5, shows Micro Electrode Array (MEA) chips with nutrients placed on neurons at Cortical Labs’ Physical Containment Level 2 (PC2) laboratory in Melbourne. – AFP

The CL1 isn’t limited to computer games – the chip can be coded to perform a range of applications, from drug screening to AI-like machine learning.

“We are just scratching the surface of what these neural cultures can achieve when integrated in systems like our CL1,” said chief scientific and operations officer Brett Kagan.

“Our neural cultures have been explored for a variety of tasks,” he said – everything from “robotics, real-time learning tasks that are similar to AI, as well as healthcare, medicine, disease modelling, drug screening and even personalised medicine”.

Not ‘wacky science’

Kagan describes the CL1 chip as “a more sustainable and more powerful form of intelligence”.

The human brain runs on an estimated 20 watts of power, a level of efficiency that silicon computing and artificial intelligence have not yet been able to replicate.

While it’s “not aimed to replace what AI is doing” it’s intended to “give us abilities that we’ve never had before”, Kagan said.

The cells have a six-month lifespan and aren’t yet capable of producing consistent, programmable results.

But analysts say the project’s value could lie in its more sustainable power consumption compared to regular chips.

“We need better ways to manage that power envelope and get higher levels of efficiency,” William Keating, CEO of semiconductor research company Ingenuity, said.

“This isn’t wacky science or some bunch of scammers. This is real science and it’s making real progress.” – AFP

Netanyahu says capturing Beaufort 'dramatic shift' in Lebanon offensive



This photo taken from a position in the Upper Galilee region in northern Israel shows destroyed buildings in the southern Lebanon against the backdrop of the medieval Beaufort Castle, locally known as Qalaat al-Shaqif or Shaqif Arnoun, yesterday.

— AFP

QLAYAA, Lebanon — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed to push deeper into Lebanon after his military took over the medieval castle of Beaufort yesterday, calling it a “dramatic shift” in the campaign against Hezbollah.

The Iran-backed militant group said yesterday it targeted Israeli army positions and infrastructure in Shlomi and Nahariya in northern Israel, while air raid sirens blared in the Acre area.

Lebanon was dragged into the Middle East war on March 2 when Hezbollah fired rockets towards Israel in retaliation for the US-Israeli killing of Iran’s supreme leader.

A truce to halt the fighting between Israel and Hezbollah began on April 17, but has never been observed. Both sides accuse each other daily of violating the ceasefire and justify their attacks by the other’s alleged breaches.

As fighting escalated in Lebanon, France said yesterday it requested an emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council, alarmed by Israel’s “ever-deeper occupation of Lebanese territory”.

Israeli forces used the Beaufort castle, also known as Qalaat al-Chakif, as a base during their previous two-decade occupation of southern Lebanon that ended in 2000.

In a video statement released hours after the military took Beaufort, Netanyahu said “we have returned united, determined and stronger than ever”.

“Now my directive is to deepen and expand our hold in places that were under Hezbollah’s control. The capture of Beaufort is a dramatic stage and a dramatic shift in the policy we are leading.”

Shelling was audible and smoke rose from the surrounding area as AFP saw the Israeli flag above the castle.

Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said troops had captured the historic strongpoint, which commands sweeping views of south Lebanon, as they expanded their ground operations.

“Forty-four years after the heroic Battle of Beaufort, and on this day commemorating the soldiers who fell in the First Lebanon War (1982), our troops have returned to the summit of Beaufort and once again raised the Israeli flag there,” Katz said in a social media post.

‘We will return’

In a shelter for the displaced in Sidon, southern Lebanon’s largest city, Zeinab Fakih, from Nabatieh, told AFP “of course we are afraid”.

“It is impossible for us to return to our home, because the city is in great destruction,” she said, adding that the arrival of Israeli forces at the castle was “tragic”.

Issa Tfaily, also displaced from Nabatieh, said: “We will return... if not today, then tomorrow, as long as there is resistance.”

The push to Beaufort came as the Israeli military issued a sweeping evacuation order to areas south of the Zahrani River,

north of the Litani and around 40 kilometres from the border.

It said it was targeting “Hezbollah infrastructure in Tyre and several additional areas in southern Lebanon” as Lebanon’s state-run National News Agency (NNA) reported a series of strikes on the area.

An Israeli strike near a hospital in Tyre wounded 13 staffers, according to the Lebanese health ministry.

An AFP correspondent in Tyre saw a large plume of smoke rising from the city with sounds of ambulances at the scene.

Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam had accused Israel on Saturday of pursuing a “scorched-earth policy and collective punishment” in the south, urging a halt to the fighting.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot said yesterday that “nothing can justify the continuation of Israeli military operations in Lebanon and its ever-deeper occupation of Lebanese territory”.

Military delegations from Lebanon and Israel held security talks in Washington on Friday, with more US-brokered negotiations planned next week.

The Israeli army said yesterday that one of its soldiers had been killed a day earlier by a Hezbollah explosive drone, bringing to 25 the number of Israeli military deaths in Lebanon since early March.

The Lebanese health ministry says Israeli attacks have killed more than 3,371 people since early March.

— AFP

Iran says does not trust US as Trump toughens terms

TEHRAN — Iran’s chief negotiator warned yesterday that the United States is not to be trusted, saying Tehran would not agree to any deal with Washington unless it fully secures Iranian rights.

Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf’s remarks came as reports emerged that US President Donald Trump had sent a tougher peace proposal back to Iran, and underlined the rift that the parties still need to close.

Any further tweaks to the draft could further delay an agreement to formally end the Middle East war and reopen the Strait of Hormuz after weeks of fraught negotiations marked by sharp rhetoric and occasional flare-ups of violence.

Iran was already in negotiations with the United States about the fate of its nuclear programme in February, when the US and Israel launched air and missile strikes that wiped out much of the Islamic republic’s senior leadership.

And, while Tehran has long insisted that its nuclear programme is for purely civilian ends, the United States and its Western allies have long suspected it aims to develop a weapon.

Nuclear guarantees

The *New York Times* and *Axios* reported on Saturday that Trump had sent back a “tougher” new framework to be considered by Iran, though details remain unclear.

Trump has said his priorities include stopping Iran from any nuclear weapon development and re-opening the Hormuz shipping lane, over which Iran has sought to impose control since the war began.

“The one guarantee that I have to have is that there will be no nuclear weapons. They’ve agreed to that, and it was very interesting,” he told his daughter-in-law Lara Trump in an interview on her Fox News show.

But Tehran has previously cast doubt on Trump’s assertions and the sides remain far apart on key issues.

“We will not approve any agreement until we are certain that the rights of the Iranian people have been upheld,” Ghalibaf said, in a video broadcast on state television.

According to Iran’s Tasnim news agency, “exchanges between

Iran and the United States regarding the text of a possible memorandum of understanding are ongoing, with both parties regularly proposing amendments.

“No agreement has yet been finalised, and it is possible that any agreement will be rejected,” it said.

Iran has said it needs the release of US\$12 billion in frozen assets before engaging in substantive talks on its nuclear program, dismissing earlier Trump comments that its enriched uranium stockpile would be destroyed as “baseless”, according to Iranian media.

Tehran has also insisted that Lebanon be included in any deal, despite ongoing fighting, with Beirut accusing Israel of a “scorched-earth policy” as it expands operations against Iran-backed Hezbollah.

Flare-ups

Though daily strikes throughout Iran and the Gulf halted after Tehran and Washington struck a temporary ceasefire in April and talks mediated by Pakistan, sporadic fighting has continued.

Iran’s Revolutionary Guards had shot down a US military drone “about to enter Iranian territorial waters”, Iran’s state broadcaster IRIB reported, though Washington has not confirmed the incident.

Earlier last week, the worst fighting since the ceasefire erupted when US forces struck the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas, prompting retaliatory fire from Iran.

Nevertheless, diplomacy has continued with Trump under pressure to secure a deal that would lift competing US and Iranian blockades around the Strait of Hormuz that have strangled a vital route for global oil supplies.

After Trump said Iran would charge “no tolls” on ships passing through the strait under any deal, Iranian news agency Fars cited sources saying “no such clause” existed.

Iran’s ISNA news agency on Saturday quoted lawmaker Alireza Salimi as saying a plan “to implement Iran’s management and sovereignty” over the strait — which includes imposing “administrative fees” for navigation — would soon go before parliament.

— AFP

Iran shuts café over ‘satanic’ activities: media

TEHRAN — Iranian authorities have shut down a café in central Tehran over allegations that it promoted “satanic” activities, local media reported yesterday.

The café, located on Tehran’s famed Valiasr street, had hosted events featuring Western-style music that “provided a setting for abnormal behaviours,” the Fars

news agency reported.

The Mehr news agency said police accused patrons of engaging in “satanic movements”.

A 14-second muted video carried by Tasnim news agency showed a packed venue where performers played guitars while some customers nodded their heads in apparent rhythm with the music.

Iranian authorities have long carried out raids and arrests targeting gatherings or networks accused of promoting “satanism,” and have in the past labelled some rock and heavy metal concerts as satanist events.

The Islamic republic has a history of targeting activities it considers contrary to Islamic values or influenced by Western cultures.

— AFP



Iranians shop at a market in Tehran’s Sadeghiyeh Square yesterday.

— AFP

Africa CDC says over 1,100 suspected Ebola cases in DRC, Uganda

NAIROBI – More than 1,100 people were suspected of having contracted Ebola in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and neighbouring Uganda, the head of the African Union's (AU) health agency said yesterday in a commentary for the *Financial Times*.

Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director General Jean Kaseya said there were 263 confirmed cases in both countries as of Saturday, with 43 confirmed deaths.

More than 1,100 suspected cases were still being investigated, he wrote in the commentary. On Thursday, the Africa CDC said there had been 246 suspected deaths from the virus.

"We must move at the speed of the epidemic," added Kaseya, criticising Africa's dependence on outside financial support.

The health ministers of the DRC, Uganda and South Sudan recently adopted a US\$319-million response plan to the outbreak.

"That momentum must now expand across the continent," Kaseya said, calling the latest Ebola outbreak a "serious test" for the Africa CDC and the African Union.

"This outbreak will not be the last," he added.

The outbreak was declared on May 15 in Ituri, in the northeast DRC, which is home to more than 100 million people and is one of the poorest countries in the world.

The virus, which can cause a deadly haemorrhagic fever, has been detected in three Congolese provinces as well as in Uganda.

No vaccine or approved treatment is available against the Bundibugyo strain of the virus and efforts to contain its spread rely mainly on preventative measures.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has triggered an international health alert but the true scale of the outbreak is not yet known.

International health authorities believe that current figures are likely an underestimation.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus continued a visit to Ituri province yesterday and has pledged support to local communities affected by the outbreak.

"You are not alone in this. We are here, we are with you and we will see this through together," he said after arriving on Saturday.

– AFP

Malta's Labour Party wins historic 4th term amid Mideast crisis

NAXXAR – Malta's centre-left Labour Party won an unprecedented fourth term yesterday in a victory for outgoing Prime Minister Robert Abela, who had called a snap election in light of geopolitical uncertainties.

Fireworks were set off across the tiny Mediterranean island and ecstatic Labour supporters dressed in the party's red chanted "four times!" after officials in the Counting House in Naxxar said preliminary results gave the election to the governing party.

"Today we have written a page in history, together," Abela told cheering crowds yesterday from the balcony of the party headquarters, as supporters chanted "Robert is our leader, Hallelujah!"

The 48-year-old had sent the country to vote a year early, saying the government needed a fresh mandate in order to shield the tiny, import-reliant island from the Middle East crisis.

While Malta's economy grew 4.0 percent last year, there are concerns the conflict could have an impact on tourism due to spiralling aviation fuel costs and drive up inflation.

Abela campaigned on Labour's economic record since 2013, pledging stability in a period of uncertainty.

"I've voted Labour since I was a little girl, I'm thrilled," 73-year-old Margaret Camilleri told AFP, as Labour supporters drove past on a truck with speakers blaring the Queen song "We are the Champions".

Abela's main rival was Nationalist Party (PN) candidate Alex Borg, a 30-year-old lawyer and former "Mr World Malta" beauty pageant winner, who had urged the Maltese to vote for change.

Borg conceded yesterday, saying in an address posted on social media that he had "personally called Robert Abela to congratulate him" on the win.



Malta's outgoing Prime Minister and leader of the Labour Party (PL) Robert Abela (centre) waves as he celebrates from his headquarters balcony following the results of Malta's legislative elections, in Hamrun, yesterday. His centre-left party came out on top in the parliamentary elections, giving a historic fourth term to the Labour Party government, which had called a snap election against a backdrop of geopolitical uncertainties.

– AFP

Abela has led Malta since 2020, when his predecessor quit following a political crisis over the assassination in 2017 of reporter Daphne Caruana Galizia, who exposed corruption at the highest level in the country.

According to a 2025 Council of Europe report, Malta remains significantly behind in the fight against corruption – but the issue was not a hot topic on the campaign trail.

Population boom

Malta's economic performance trumped other concerns.

Located off the coast of Sicily, Malta is the smallest and most densely populated country in the European Union, with around 550,000 people living in 316 square kilometres.

The island has a thriving economy based largely on tourism, online gaming and financial services, and one of the lowest unemployment rates in the EU.

But despite a low birth rate

the population has grown nearly 30 percent over a decade, driven largely by immigrants.

That has fuelled a construction boom, filling the skyline with cranes, creating traffic bottlenecks and putting a strain on key services.

Heritage groups have denounced environmental degradation and risks to UNESCO World Heritage sites in the former British colony.

The country has very few natural resources and imports much of its energy, leaving it exposed to external shocks.

Labour heavily subsidises energy bills and pledged to continue doing so.

Malta is also on the front line of climate change and at risk of desertification and drought, but neither main party made the issue its priority in the election campaign.

There is a green party, the ADPD, but no third party has held even a seat in Malta's parliament since before independence in 1964.

– AFP



World Health Organisation (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus visits an Ebola treatment centre to witness the discharge of recovered patients in Bunia, in the northeastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), yesterday.

– AFP

Brazil investigates 2 possible Ebola cases

BRASÍLIA – Brazilian health authorities are monitoring two patients for possible Ebola infection in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, officials said at the weekend, sparking further concern of the deadly virus outbreak in central Africa spreading abroad.

A 37-year-old man from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where the outbreak has been concentrated, "exhibited symptoms such as fever, meeting the definition of a suspected case" of Ebola, the São Paulo state government said in a statement on Saturday.

While initial tests did not detect the Ebola virus in the patient, he is being monitored and isolated as a precautionary measure at a specialised infectious disease facility, the statement said.

The health department in Rio de Janeiro state meanwhile reported that it had activated safety protocols after a man from Uganda showed "viral symptoms such as cough, chills, and diarrhoea."

The Rio city government said in an email to AFP that the patient tested positive for malaria on Saturday and "the case remains under investigation."

The true reach of the outbreak in the DRC, which is thought to have been circulating before it was detected, is likely to be much wider, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has warned.

The São Paulo government said that despite the suspected case, "the technical assessment indicates that the risk of the disease being introduced into Brazil and South America remains very low." – AFP

Hollywood studios, actors' union find common ground on AI

Paula Ramon

As Hollywood's performers cast their ballots to approve the latest negotiated contract, union leaders say they have made some progress in conversations with studio bosses since the massive strike in 2023, especially when it comes to concerns about artificial intelligence.

SAG-AFTRA chief negotiator Duncan Crabtree-Ireland attributed the mostly drama-free agreements in this round of negotiations to a new mindset, "because the studios and streamers came to the table with a different perspective."

With 160,000 members working in film, television and video games, SAG-AFTRA is the largest and most influential union of its kind globally.

Members of the actors' union are voting on a newly negotiated agreement that was approved by the national board earlier this month, ahead of the current contract's expiration at the end of June.

"The tone of the negotiation was much more collaborative and a lot more creativity was brought by both

sides, so I really believe that the 2023 strikes – while they were very difficult for all of us – did help effectuate a reset in the relationship between the studios and the unions in general," Crabtree-Ireland told AFP.

Approval would mean avoiding a repeat of disastrous 2023 strikes that shuttered productions, costing studios billions of US dollars, while actors stood their ground against AI and other issues.

AI's evolutions

The strike by the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA) lasted 118 days, with star-studded picket lines outside major studios in Los Angeles and New York, marking the longest such revolt in Hollywood history.

AI technology was a sticking point for many, and that tension persists, Crabtree-Ireland said.

"They do feel more secure than they did in 2023 but there's still a very, very strong concern about AI – and especially because the

generative AI tools have advanced so much in the last three years," he said.

The latest agreement does not close the door on AI, but it does introduce new protections.

Under the new contract, digital replicas – which use AI or any technology to replicate an actual living or deceased performer – must "have informed consent and fair compensation," Crabtree-Ireland said.

The contract allows for limited use of synthetics, under "unusual circumstances," when a generative AI system can be used to create a character who is not based on any actual person in the world.

"There's now process in place which would require the companies to come to the union if they want to use a synthetic in a project, they have to demonstrate to us that this synthetic brings a significant additional value to the production," Crabtree-Ireland said.

"While this doesn't rise quite to the level of a complete prohibition, it's a very strong disincentive."

Voting on the latest contract closes June 4.

– AFP

Top US and Cuban military officers meet at Guantánamo Bay

WASHINGTON, DC – Senior US and Cuban military officers met on Friday at Guantánamo Bay, the US base on the island, as relations between the two countries deteriorate over President Donald Trump’s threatened takeover.

US General Francis Donovan met with Cuban General Roberto Legra Sotolongo “for a brief exchange on operational security matters,” the US Southern Command said in a statement issued along with a photograph of the meeting.

“Gen. Donovan also led a perimeter security assessment of the naval base and discussed force protection, safety of service members and their families, and operational readiness with base officials.”

Cuba’s Ministry of Revolutionary Armed Forces stressed that “both

delegations consider the meeting to have been positive” and they agreed “to maintain communication between the two military commands,” according to a statement released on Facebook.

The uniformed men met at the US base at the southeastern tip of the island.

Relations between Havana and Washington have continued to worsen since January, when the United States imposed a de facto oil blockade on the island by operating a military raid to remove leftist Nicolas Maduro from power in Venezuela.

Without Caracas as a lifeline, Cuba has struggled to keep electricity on, or food and medicine in stock.

Now Cuba is facing the brink of collapse.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who is Cuban American, has said the US is seeing a diplomatic solution to the standoff.

Reports last week suggested that Havana was considering drone strikes on the base in the event of a US attack.

Guantánamo Bay, 700 kilometres southeast of Miami, is notorious as the site of abuse against terror suspects detained after the September 11, 2001 attacks.

Trump has also planned to use the base as a holding centre for undocumented migrants.

“Naval Station Guantánamo Bay is a vital operational and logistical hub that supports US military efforts to counter threats that undermine security, stability and democracy in our hemisphere,” US Southern Command said. – AFP



This photo, posted on the X account of the US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) on Friday, shows SOUTHCOM Commander General Francis L. Donovan (centre), the Chief of the General Staff and First Deputy Minister of Cuba’s Revolutionary Armed Forces (MINFAR) General Roberto Legra Sotolongo (second from left) and other US and Cuban military officials, during their meeting at the perimeter of the US Naval Station in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, on Friday. – AFP

China-Africa cultural exchange event held in Mozambique

MAPUTO – The 2026 China-Africa Cultural and Artistic Exchange Tour and the “Silk Road Art Dialogue” Exhibition were held at the Mozambique-China Cultural Center in Maputo last week, drawing hundreds of participants from political, cultural, educational and business sectors.

Held under the theme “Sharing Silk Road Friendship, Painting a Shared China-Africa Future,” the event aimed to enhance mutual understanding and friendship between the peoples of China and Mozambique through artistic and cultural exchanges.

Speaking at the opening ceremony on Wednesday, former Mozambican President Joaquim Chissano reviewed the long-standing friendship between the two countries, saying that cultural exchanges help deepen mutual understanding between peoples and inject new vitality into bilateral relations.

The event featured the opening of the “Silk Road Art Dialogue” Exhibition, which brought together works by Chinese and Mozambican artists, including traditional Chinese ink paintings, calligraphy and contemporary Mozambican artworks. The exhibition showcased both the charm of traditional Chinese culture and the rich social and cultural life of Mozambique.

Mozambican visual artist



A visitor looks at traditional Chinese paintings during the “Silk Road Art Dialogue” exhibition at the Mozambique-China Cultural Center in Maputo, Mozambique, on Thursday. – Xinhua

Naguib Elias Abdula said the exhibition served as an important platform for cultural exchanges between the two countries. Beyond presenting artistic achievements, it created opportunities for broader cooperation in painting, music, dance, theatre, and other fields.

Chinese artists also conducted traditional Chinese painting workshops and cultural exchange activities. Local visitors and art enthusiasts were introduced to the techniques and artistic philosophy of Chinese ink painting, with many taking part in hands-on experiences.

Zhang Ziyang, president of the China-Africa Cultural Promotion

Association and one of the event’s organizers, expressed hope that more diverse cultural exchange programs would continue to strengthen mutual understanding and traditional friendship between the peoples of China and Mozambique.

The cultural and artistic exchange tour will continue in several African countries, including South Africa and Zimbabwe, featuring exhibitions, cultural experiences and youth exchange activities to promote mutual learning among civilizations and closer people-to-people ties between China and Africa.

– Xinhua

Mozambique hosts Chinese Bridge competition

MAPUTO – The Mozambican finals of the 25th Chinese Bridge Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign College Students were held on Thursday by the Confucius Institute at Eduardo Mondlane University in the Mozambican capital of Maputo.

Manuel Guilherme Júnior, rector of Eduardo Mondlane University, said that the competition is not only a stage for showcasing Chinese language proficiency and Chinese cultural talents, but also an important platform for China-Africa cultural exchanges and the deepening of friendship.

He expressed hope that the Mozambican contestants will achieve even better results on the international stage.

The competition consisted of themed speeches, impromptu

question-and-answer sessions, and Chinese cultural talent performances featuring poetry, music and martial arts. The national champion will represent Mozambique at the global finals in China.

Deolfinha Macuacua, winner of this year’s competition, said that participating in the competition in China would mean representing not only herself, but also Mozambique, and that she would continue preparing hard for the global finals.

China and Mozambique have been strengthening cooperation in education, science, technology and people-to-people exchanges in recent years, with the Chinese Bridge competition gradually becoming one of the major platforms for linguistic and cultural exchanges. – Xinhua

Angola records 13 mpox cases in northern regions

LUANDA – Angola has recorded 13 confirmed cases of mpox in its northern regions, Health Minister Silvia Lutucuta said on Thursday.

Speaking to the press after the first meeting of the Local Governance Council, Lutucuta urged the public to continue observing preventive measures recommended by health authorities to help curb the spread of the disease.

As part of prevention efforts, Angola is distributing mpox vaccine doses to the provinces, she said, adding that Angola has not recorded any suspected cases of Ebola.

According to the minister, health authorities have stepped up surveillance in border areas, including temperature screening for travelers entering and leaving the country. – Xinhua

Foreign direct investment in Portugal rebounds in Q1

LISBON – Foreign direct investment (FDI) in Portugal reached 2.1 billion euros (US\$2.45 billion) in the first quarter of this year, recovering from a negative reading of 1.6 billion euros recorded in the same period last year, the Bank of Portugal reported on Thursday.

The rebound follows a 35 percent drop in FDI throughout 2025, and at the end of March, the total stock of FDI in Portugal stood at 218 billion

euros, while Portugal’s investment stock abroad totaled 79.21 billion euros, the report said.

Oscar Afonso, dean of the Faculty of Economics at the University of Porto, said Portugal faces a structural paradox in its investment profile.

While the stock of foreign investment is substantial, he warned that the economy remains concentrated in low-value-

added sectors such as services, extractive industries, agriculture, and real estate, while lagging in manufacturing, which drives productivity and innovation.

Afonso also cited bureaucracy, a high tax burden, regulatory constraints and talent retention as factors limiting Portugal’s ability to attract higher-quality investment and pay competitive wages.

– Xinhua

Portugal records highest May temperature as heatwave intensifies

LISBON – Portugal has recorded its highest temperature ever for the month of May as a heatwave continues to affect regions south of the Tagus (Tejo) River, the Portuguese Institute for Sea and Atmosphere (IPMA) said on Thursday.

The town of Mora, in southern Portugal, reached 40.3 degrees Celsius on Wednesday, surpassing the previous national May record of 40 degrees

Celsius registered in Pinhão on May 30, 1953, and in Termas de Monfortinho during the final two days of May 2001.

The heatwave began on May 20 and has been particularly concentrated in the Alentejo region and the Tagus Valley, the institute said.

The institute warned that there is a strong probability that the ongoing heatwave will continue this week. – Xinhua



Liverpool's Dutch manager Arne Slot celebrates with the Premier League trophy at the end of the English Premier League match against Crystal Palace at Anfield in Liverpool, north west England on May 25, 2025. Liverpool have confirmed head coach Arne Slot is to depart his role as head coach, according to a club statement on Saturday. - AFP



Japan edge Iceland in final pre-World Cup friendly

TOKYO – Japan coach Hajime Moriyasu backed his team to grind out wins at the World Cup after edging Iceland 1-0 in their final warm-up friendly in Tokyo yesterday.

Substitute Koki Ogawa scored in the 87th minute to send Japan to the tournament in the United States, Canada and Mexico on a high after a tough night in front of more than 60,000 at the National Stadium.

Japan looked flat after starting their World Cup preparations this week but Moriyasu said snatching a win was a good sign for the tournament ahead.

“It was difficult to break Iceland open and they had some dangerous chances on the counter-attack,” he said.

“But we kept a clean sheet and won, and you get games like that at the World Cup, so this will help us.”

Japan will face the Netherlands, Sweden and Tunisia in Group F and play the Dutch in their opener on June 14.

They will be without winger Kaoru Mitoma, who was ruled out of the World Cup after injuring his hamstring less than a week before Moriyasu named his squad.

Former Arsenal defender Takehiro Tomiyasu returned for his first international appearance in two years after long periods out through injury.

Liverpool midfielder Wataru Endo also returned from injury to start the game.

“If you think of their top performances, they still have room to improve,” Moriyasu said of both players.

“But they are getting fitter and I want to help them keep raising their level at the World Cup.”

Tomiyasu started alongside Maya Yoshida, who captained Japan at the 2022



Japan's Keito Nakamura (back, right) shoots during the international friendly against Iceland at the National Stadium in Tokyo yesterday. - AFP

World Cup in Qatar and was recalled for a final farewell.

The 37-year-old Yoshida, who is not in Japan's World Cup squad, was given a guard of honour by both teams after coming off in the 13th minute, having won his 127th cap.

Keito Nakamura started in Mitoma's usual position on the left, and he rolled an early chance wide of the post.

Japan took their foot off the gas and Iceland almost took advantage with several goal-scoring chances in the first half.

Moriyasu rang the changes at the break and made 11 substitutions in total.

The home side's persistence paid off when Ogawa found the net with time running out, cannoning a header in off the post.

Iceland coach Amar Gunnlaugsson, whose team did not qualify for the World Cup, said Japan's players had “the whole package”.

“I think they will do really well at the World Cup,” he said.

“I think it's almost like a perfect team, in a sense. They can do everything really well.” - AFP

Football shorts

Kvaratskhelia named Champions League player of the season

PARIS – Paris Saint-Germain's Georgian winger Khvicha Kvaratskhelia was named Champions League player of the season yesterday by a UEFA panel of judges.

Kvaratskhelia was a constant menace in PSG's defence of the title with ten goals and six assists from his 16 games.

PSG came from a goal down against Arsenal on Saturday to equalise from the spot on 65 minutes after Kvaratskhelia was scythed to the floor inside the box with Ousmane Dembele converting the spot-kick.

Both had left the fray before the game went to extra-time and ended 1-1, before PSG emerged from a shoot-out as narrow 4-3 winners.

UEFA's technical observer board of around 30 football dignitaries such as Gareth Southgate, Ole Gunnar Solskjaer and Rafa Benitez voted for the award.

The panel's statement described his season as pivotal and dazzling.

“Arguably Kvaratskhelia's finest performance came in the unforgettable 5-4 semi-final first-leg win over Bayern, as he curled in a beauty to draw his side level at 1-1 before adding a fierce drive in the second period to complete a fine double,” they said.

He also scored three goals over the two legs against Chelsea in the last 16 and another at Liverpool in the quarter-finals.

The now 25-year-old was also on the score sheet in the 2025 final as PSG thumped Inter Milan 5-0. - AFP

Spain star Yamal admits he feared missing World Cup

MADRID – Spanish national team star Lamine Yamal admitted yesterday he had been “afraid” of missing the World Cup because of the hamstring injury he is still recovering from.

The 18-year-old suffered the injury as he scored a penalty for Barcelona against Celta Vigo on April 22.

“Internally I was praying it was nothing, that it was just cramp or something like that, because the World Cup was very close and I knew that a hamstring injury is never a short-term thing,” said the winger to the Spanish football federation's own media outlet.

“I was afraid it might be serious and, above all, that even if it wasn't serious, I could suffer a setback and end up missing the World Cup.”

Spain coach Luis de la Fuente is hopeful he will have him available for La Roja's opening game at the World Cup against Cape Verde on June 15.

Yesterday, the player warmed up with his team-mates in Spain's first training session before heading to work in the gym.

“It's also true that it helps knowing you're going to play a World Cup, so mentally it's like you haven't played a single game all season, and I'm really eager to make my debut (at the tournament),” he added.

Yamal, who starred as Spain won Euro 2024 in Germany, said the World Cup is the “biggest thing” in football and he has dreamt “a thousand times” about lifting the trophy.

If Yamal does not make the first match he is expected to play some part against Saudi Arabia in the second on June 21, and Uruguay on June 27 in the other Group H fixtures. - AFP

Man Utd's Fletcher called into Scotland World Cup squad

GLASGOW – Manchester United's Tyler Fletcher has been called into Scotland's World Cup squad in place of the injured Billy Gilmour despite not being on Steve Clarke's initial standby list.

Son of former Scotland captain Darren Fletcher, the midfielder was among a group of youngsters used by Clarke to train alongside the squad over the past week.

The 19-year-old was then thrown on for his international debut in the second half of Saturday's 4-1 friendly win over Curacao.

Rangers' Connor Barron, Udinese's Lennon Miller and Andy Irving of Sparta Prague were the midfielders who had initially been placed on Clarke's reserve list.

But Fletcher has jumped ahead of them, despite having played just 17 minutes of senior football for United.

“I had to disappoint another three players this morning again, to tell them that they had missed out,” said Clarke.

“I just felt Tyler came into the squad this week and showed up really well, did well in the game so that was the thinking behind that one.”

“Obviously devastated for Billy and also really disappointed for Lennon, Andy Irving and Connor Barron.”

Scotland flew out to the United States yesterday to continue their World Cup preparations.

Clarke's men face Bolivia in a final warm-up friendly on June 6.

In their first World Cup for 28 years, Scotland take on Haiti, Morocco and Brazil in Group C. - AFP

Man City women win FA Cup to complete double

LONDON – Manchester City's women completed a double by thrashing Brighton 4-0 to lift the FA Cup yesterday.

After securing a first Women's Super League title for 10 years, Andree Jeglert's side had too much firepower for a Brighton team that had reached the FA Cup final for the first time.

The Seagulls started brightly at Wembley but never recovered once City's talisman Khadija Shaw opened the scoring.

A three-time WSL Golden Boot winner, Shaw ended speculation over her future last Monday by signing a new four-year deal that will reportedly make her the highest paid player in the women's game.

The Jamaican international showed why she is so highly valued by beating goalkeeper Chiamaka Nnadozie to Alex Greenwood's cross to power in a header.

Nnadozie then failed to keep out Greenwood's low free-kick as City doubled their lead before half-time.

Substitute Aoba Fujino added a third in the second half after more good work by Shaw to tee up the Japan international.

Vivianne Miedema rounded off the scoring three minutes from time.

City's four FA Cup triumphs have all come in the past nine years after also lifting the trophy in 2017, 2019 and 2020. - AFP

Vingegaard wins Giro d'Italia to complete Grand Tour set

Cycling

ROME – Jonas Vingegaard completed his Giro d'Italia triumph yesterday, securing the first part of a coveted Grand Tour double in a procession finale around Rome won by home hero Jonathan Milan.

Dane Vingegaard rolled into the Italian capital needing just to complete the flat final stage to claim overall victory and the triple crown of road cycling's three-week showpieces.

The Visma-Lease a Bike rider is just the eighth man to win the Giro, Tour and Vuelta a Espana in his career, joining Bernard Hinault, Eddy Merckx and Vincenzo Nibali in reaching one of road cycling's hardest goals.

His attentions now turn to the Tour de France in July and a showdown with Tadej Pogacar, road cycling's biggest star and his key rival for the Grande Boucle.

Vingegaard, already a two-time Tour winner, didn't have Pogacar to contend with on the Giro which he won without ever really looking like being challenged.

The 29-year-old had little to do yesterday beyond look at the ancient monuments of Rome's historic centre after finishing the hard work with a classic mountain stage win the day before.

He finishes the Tour with five stage wins and a gap of five minutes and 22 seconds over Felix Gall who completes his best ever finish in a Grand Tour.

For Milan, crossing the line first in Rome after a typically powerful late burst salvaged his Giro, the Italian winning his first stage of this year's edition of his home Grand Tour.

Milan has had a difficult Giro and couldn't stop Paul Magnier winning the points jersey for the sprinters. – AFP



Team Visma Lease a Bike Danish rider Jonas Vingegaard wearing the overall leader's pink jersey holds a glass of sparkling wine with Team Visma Lease a Bike US rider Sepp Kuss during the 21st stage of the Giro d'Italia 2026 - Tour of Italy cycling race of 131km from Rome to Rome, yesterday. – AFP

Bezzecchi wins Italian MotoGP, extends championship lead

MotoGP

MUGELLO – Marco Bezzecchi won the Italian MotoGP yesterday to strengthen his bid for a first world title, as Marc Marquez finished seventh on his comeback from injury.

Starting from pole, the Aprilia rider won his battle with fellow Italian Francesco Bagnaia who ended up third behind Bezzecchi's teammate and closest title challenger Jorge Martin.

Bezzecchi leads Martin by 17 points in the championship standings after winning his fourth grand prix from the seven raced so far this season.

The 27-year-old crossed the line over three seconds ahead of Martin.

"It's incredible. Winning at Mugello is something I've dreamed of since I was a child, so to achieve it is truly amazing," said Bezzecchi.

Bezzecchi was overtaken by Bagnaia, who started sixth on the grid, at the start of the third lap, but stayed on his countryman's tail and took charge on lap 14 with a daring move to the front.

Bezzecchi sped off into the distance while Bagnaia tried and failed to hold off Martin and just about fended off attacks from Japan's Ai Ogura.

Bezzecchi's win was a perfect end to the weekend for Aprilia after Martin broke the Mugello speed record during Saturday's sprint with an astonishing 368.6 kilometres per hour.

Marc Marquez had threatened the podium on his return from a shoulder surgery and a broken foot suffered in a spectacular crash at the French MotoGP earlier this month.

The injury kept him out of the main race at Le Mans as well as the last race weekend in Barcelona, and he flagged towards the end yesterday, losing his battle with Pedro Acosta and slipping down the placings. – AFP

Frenchman Lanier breaks local hearts to win Singapore Open badminton

Badminton

SINGAPORE – France's Alex Lanier dashed Loh Kean Yew's hopes of becoming the first Singaporean in more than six decades to win his national badminton title, beating the home favourite in the Singapore Open men's singles final yesterday.

The Frenchman, unfazed by the partisan home crowd, defeated Loh 17-21, 21-15, 21-14.

Lanier secured his second BWF World Tour title of the year, denying the crowd its first local champion since Wee Choon Seng in 1962.

"I knew that I needed to fight really hard and was determined to do that," the 21-year-old Frenchman said.

Lanier regained control of the second game after losing the first and raced to a 13-5 lead, before Loh narrowed the deficit to 13-11.

He admitted to losing focus but managed to steady himself and close out the game and force a decider.

Lanier then took command of the third game, never relinquishing the lead.

In the women's singles final, world number one An Se Young of South Korea overcame stiff resistance from Japan's Akane

Yamaguchi to win 21-11, 17-21, 21-19.

An seized the early initiative before Yamaguchi fought back to win the second game.

The 24-year-old appeared on the brink of defeat when trailing 16-19 before she reeled off five consecutive points to complete a dramatic victory.

It was her fourth individual win of the year and also her third Singapore Open crown, having lifted the trophy in 2023 and 2024.

"I was impatient in the second game and tried to finish the match too early," An said. "But in the third game, I told myself to stay calm and focus on winning each point. That approach paid off."

Jia Yi Fan and Zhang Shu Xian defeated Liu Sheng Shu and Tan Ning 22-20, 21-19 in an all-Chinese women's doubles final.

The Danish pair of Mathias Christiansen and Alexandra Boje beat Japan's Yuichi Shimogami and Sayaka Hobara 17-21, 21-12, 21-12 to win the mixed doubles title.

India's Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty secured the men's doubles title with an 18-21, 21-17, 21-16 defeated of Indonesian pair Fajar Alfian and Muhammad Shohibul Fikri. – AFP



Swiatek exits French Open, Zverev, Ruud eye quarters

PARIS – Four-time French Open champion Iga Swiatek exited Roland Garros as the top seeds continued to fall at the start of the second week.

The Polish third seed endured a miserable 25th birthday as she went down 7-5, 6-1 to Madrid Open winner Marta Kostyuk.

Since winning Roland Garros in her second appearance at the tournament in 2020, Swiatek had never gone more than two years without hoisting aloft the Coupe Suzanne Lenglen, but after Aryna Sabalenka ended her bid to win a fourth consecutive French Open in the semi-finals last year, she has lost her unbeatable status on clay.

Indeed, since last winning in Paris in 2024, Swiatek has only lifted three titles in the two subsequent seasons.

"I feel, like, for sure I lost today because Marta used the opportunity, and I was super tense," she said.

"It is harder a bit to handle stress for me in, like, (the) last year.

"So, I feel like today I felt off, you know, and I did mistakes that I didn't want to do, and I wanted to play safe, but the ball flew everywhere.

"Suddenly these feelings came back, and I tried to work on it with my dialogue inside, but it was tough today. Yeah, so it all kind of went drastically down, and I played worse and worse."

After breaking Kostyuk in the first set to edge 4-3 ahead, Swiatek's serve totally deserted her and she failed to hold again as the Ukrainian hit back to claim the opener and then raced through the second frame.

For Kostyuk, reaching a first quarter-final at Roland Garros was just the latest high mark in a fine clay-court season, in which she claimed the 250-level event in Rouen, as well as a first WTA 1000 title in the Spanish capital.

Elina Svitolina next stands between her compatriot and the last four after she fought back to beat Swiss 11th seed Belinda Bencic 4-6, 6-4, 6-0.

The seventh seed has reached the quarter-finals at the French Open on five previous occasions but has failed to ever go beyond that mark.

After winning a first WTA 1000 title in eight years earlier in May at the Italian Open, Svitolina's last-eight encounter with Kostyuk will pit against each other the two winners of the main warm-up events to Roland Garros.

"It's exciting. Definitely she's been playing really well," Svitolina said of Kostyuk, who is on a 15-match win streak on the red dirt.

"I feel like it's going to be an exciting battle for Ukraine, as well, you know, that

there will be one Ukrainian in the semis. Yeah, I think it's really cool."

'Very grateful for everything'

Sorana Cirstea continued her remarkable renaissance during her farewell season on tour as the 36-year-old bested Chinese world number 148 Wang Xiyu 6-3, 7-6 (7/4).

The Romanian will face either Russian eighth seed Mirra Andreeva who beat Switzerland's 170th-ranked Jil Teichmann 6-3, 6-2 in what will be her first quarter-final appearance at the French Open in 17 years.

"I came into my last year, wanted to go out the front door of the sport, wanting to really do well, but I didn't really think it was going to go that well," Cirstea, who arrived in Paris at a career-high ranking of 18th, said.

"In the same time it's very beautiful. I'm very grateful for everything that's happening."

Rising Spanish star Rafael Jodar has been no stranger to lengthy matches in his debut Roland Garros campaign but the 19-year-old's five-set win over fellow countryman Pablo Carreno Busta was even longer drawn out than it would otherwise have been as the heatwave that defined the first week subsided to rain, which caused brief delays in play.

Jodar battled back from two sets down to beat the 34-year-old 4-6, 4-6, 6-1, 6-2, 6-2 and progress to the last eight.

Zverev eases into last 8

German second seed Alexander Zverev kept alive his hopes of claiming a first Grand Slam title as he beat Dutch lucky loser Jesper de Jong in straight sets yesterday.

The 29-year-old, a three-time runner-up in major finals, eased into the quarter-finals at Roland Garros with a 7-6 (7/3), 6-4, 6-1 win over his 106th-ranked opponent.

With the men's draw certain to produce a first-time Grand Slam champion, Zverev is considered the favourite to be that player as he bids to cast away the unwanted title of tennis' nearly-man.

He overcame an early break of serve in the first set to take the opener in a tie-break.

From then on, it was plain sailing for the big-serving Hamburg native as he raced through to victory in two hours and 14 minutes.

"In the beginning it was a bit difficult, but once I found my rhythm I felt very comfortable on court," Zverev said.

He will meet Jodar for a place in the semi-finals tomorrow.

"He's a very young player, incredibly talented, he's come on the scene this clay-court season," Zverev said of the 19-year-old. – AFP

'Totally hooked': HK targets claw machine addiction

William Patterson

HONG KONG – Claw machine lover Neiki Lee carefully lowers the metal jaws of a crane with a joystick into a pool of prizes, only to have the small toy slip from its clutches again and again.

Dozens of stores filled with claw machines have sprung up on streets and in malls across Hong Kong's finance hub in recent years, promising players a treasure trove of prizes and a sense of fulfilment.

The colourfully lit machines, often seen drawing people like moths to a flame, have come under regulatory scrutiny this month, as officials raise concerns over addiction risks to the games. Dozens of stores filled with claw machines have sprung up on streets and in malls across the global finance hub over recent years, promising players a brief sense of fulfilment.

Lee, 48, admitted that she was "totally hooked" and that "this is definitely gambling", adding that she bets at least HK\$5 every time she attempts to win a higher-value plush toy.

'Sunk cost fallacy'

An office clerk, Lee said she has spent around HK\$100,000 on claw machines over two years – roughly half her annual salary.

"For a HK\$70 toy, you might eventually spend 700, or even 1,700, and still not be able to grab it," Lee told AFP.

"I really want to give it up. Every day I scold myself and tell myself to quit: no more, no more."

Player Tommy Yu, 23, said he sometimes spends hundreds of Hong Kong dollars a day



Gamers play claw machines in an arcade centre at a shopping mall in Hong Kong last month. The colourfully lit claw machines that line Hong Kong's streets have come under the regulatory scrutiny this month, as officials raise concerns over addiction risks to the games. Dozens of stores filled with claw machines have sprung up on streets and in malls across the global finance hub over recent years, promising players a brief sense of fulfilment. – AFP

on it despite saying some machines have "traps" built-in.

"When you put money in but don't get anything back, you feel like you've lost out," he said.

"Yet it keeps driving you to play."

Gambling counsellor Chu Ho-ming told AFP that "the more [the players] invest, the harder it is to leave empty-handed and walk away".

"This is the sunk cost fallacy," he said, add-

ing that "it keeps the addictive behaviour loop".

Chu said his team has noticed an increase in young people playing games with "gambling elements".

Too late?

Claw machine operators have been able to expand and operate largely unrestricted, after a court ruled in 2022 they are not required to possess public entertainment licences.

But after a sharp rise in the number of public complaints related to so-called claw machine gambling over the last two years, Hong Kong authorities proposed last month to tighten regulations over prize-based arcades, calling the situation after the 2022 ruling "not ideal".

The design and business models of such gaming machines are "extremely diverse", officials said, adding that they were committed to tackle the "deep-seated issues".

Some lawmakers have suggested capping the prize value at HK\$300 or below, in line with countries including Britain and Singapore.

Matthew Chan, who owns three claw machine shops in town, told AFP tighter regulation was needed as the industry "was heading in the wrong direction".

Chan bemoaned the government's slowness to act, citing that Taiwan's machines must offer a "guaranteed prize" if a certain amount of money is spent.

"The market already saw a downsize... [Hong Kong's] consumers have lost confidence in it," he said, adding that some machine operators were ramping up the difficulty and keeping players hooked.

But player Lee said she believed operators would find ways to evade any regulation enacted.

"It's impossible that a law... can be applied in a way that is both flawless and fair" for the industry, she said.

"It is difficult to root out addiction problems simply by passing a law." – AFP

Polka-dots and hypnotic riffs fuel viral duo Angine de Poitrine

Adrien De Calan

BRUSSELS – It's at the wacky end of the rock spectrum, but an unlikely recipe of polka-dot pyjamas, floppy-nosed masks and hypnotic guitar riffs has propelled Canadian duo Angine de Poitrine to viral stardom.

Clad head to toe in black-and-white robes – their faces hidden by outsized masks – the duo are known only by pseudonyms, as the "time-travelling explorers Klek and Khn".

On Thursday night last week the duo played the latest in a series of booked-out concerts across Europe, at the hip Botanique venue in Brussels, with a long list of US dates lined up through summer.

Pumping out an experimental mix of syncopated* guitar, bass and drum loops somewhere between techno and acid rock – their trademark sound is dissonant and "microtonal", which means they play the notes in between the notes.

"They're such a party!" said Clara Moes, a 24-year-old fashion

student who, like many, turned up in polka dots for the occasion. "It's like they came out of nowhere – their characters are so mysterious."

The moment the tickets went up online, "sales went through the roof", said Olivier Vanhalst, the Botanique's programmer – who says the band's unique appeal is still something of a mystery.

"People are drawn to the live experiences, a sound like none they've heard before, the mystery and the costumes," he said.

Formed in 2019 in Saguenay, in Canada's Québec region, the band's name is French for angina pectoris – a kind of chest pain that can signal a heart attack – in a nod to their art's absurdist bent.

They started out with help from the CEM experimental music centre in Saguenay, where a group of aficionados work to support niche musical forms.

The ride to fame started back in February when US radio station KEXP published a video of them

recorded at a music festival in Rennes, in western France that racked up 15 million views in three months.

"It's just wild," Jean-Louis Brossard, the Trans Musicales festival's artistic director, told AFP. "It really shows there is space for music that's different, that's not mainstream."

Secretive mystique

On stage, neither of them speak – except for an occasional war cry – as they perform fully-masked in the stifling heat of a Brussels spring heatwave.

Khn simultaneously plays guitar and bass thanks to a double-necked instrument with a looping system to layer riffs one on top of the other.

On the drums, Klek holds the heady rhythm as his giant protruding

nose bounces to the beat.

Concert-goer Peter Somers, 59 and wearing a regulation polka-dot shirt, came across the band's "bizarre" music online.

"It's so refreshing – this is not something you can create with an algorithm and AI," he said.

After a first album "Vol.1" in 2024, the duo just released a second – six tracks spanning 36 minutes and a vibe ranging from the manic "Mata Zyklek" to the gypsy whirlwind of "Utzip".

After a handful of early interviews, the pair have stopped speaking to the press – gunning instead for a secretive mystique, in the vein of legendary French duo Daft Punk.

But beyond the gimmicks, the music has drawn rave reviews from fellow musicians including Foo Fighters founder Dave Grohl, with critics

seeing influences from jazz to the US counterculture icon Frank Zappa.

Will they prove more than a flash in the pan? The Trans Musicales' Brossard says it is too soon to say – but that, for now, "the crowd response is pretty amazing".

*Syncopated ("chopping up") guitar playing – a rhythmic technique where the guitarist intentionally misaligns his or her accents with the underlying pulse of the music. Instead of striking chords or notes directly on the steady main beats (the "strong" beats), they play on the unexpected spaces between those beats (the "weak" beats or offbeats). In music theory, "syncopated" has become the definitive word for any rhythm that intentionally disrupts the regular, expected pulse of a piece of music. – Gemini



Canada's experimental rock band "Angine de Poitrine" performs during a concert part of the Nuits Botanique ("Botanical Nights") music festival in Brussels in Thursday last week. – AFP

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 21°C~35°C	Manila 25°C~31°C	New York 11°C~23°C	Lisbon 17°C~26°C
Shanghai 23°C~32°C	Bangkok 25°C~35°C	London 15°C~22°C	Rio de Janeiro 20°C~24°C
Hong Kong 24°C~30°C	Tokyo 19°C~31°C	Frankfurt 14°C~25°C	Luanda 23°C~28°C
Taipei 22°C~30°C	Singapore 25°C~32°C	Vancouver 14°C~23°C	Maputo 19°C~24°C
Guangzhou 25°C~32°C	Kuala Lumpur 25°C~35°C	Paris 15°C~25°C	Dili 23°C~31°C
Nanjing 19°C~32°C	Jakarta 26°C~33°C	Moscow 11°C~19°C	São Tomé 25°C~34°C
Guilin 23°C~35°C	Seoul 16°C~29°C	Las Vegas 22°C~37°C	Praia 21°C~30°C
Xi'an 19°C~32°C	Sydney 11°C~18°C	Monte Carlo 19°C~22°C	Bissau 26°C~34°C



White star narcissus model

The daffodil figure 'Aff im Kopf' (Monkey in your head) is seen yesterday, at the Narzissenfest in Bad Aussee, Austria - a flower festival held for the 66th time from Thursday to yesterday in the Ausseerland-Salzkammergut region and considered one of the country's largest traditional events. - AFP



Flight to freedom

A bald eagle is released to the wild during an open house event at the Orphaned Wildlife Rehabilitation Society in Delta, British Columbia, Canada, on Saturday. The event held on Saturday offered the public an opportunity to learn about the rehabilitation, care, and conservation of injured and orphaned birds of prey. - Xinhua



Angry beaver

Children look at a custom car at the 2026 Hot Wheels Legends tour in Oakville, the Greater Toronto Area, Canada, on Saturday. The Toronto stop of the yearly global custom car competition was held here on Saturday. - Xinhua

Sudsy fun

People take part in the Saltibarsciai Slip and Slide competition on an inflatable foam-covered slide during the Pink Soup Fest 2026, an annual event celebrating the "Saltibarsciai" beetroot soup in Vilnius, Lithuania, on Saturday. - AFP



Cleaning the big man

An aerial photograph shows the Cerne Abbas Giant, in Dorchester, southern England on Friday. - AFP



Certainly not day wear!

A model presents a creation at the Fashion Art Toronto's Fashion Week Spring/Summer 2026 in Toronto, Canada, on Friday. - Xinhua