

'MARCA+MACAU Plan' aims to expand external business opportunities for local products & services

Armando Neves

The Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSED) hosted a formal launch ceremony yesterday for its local brand and product promotion programme, called "MARCA+MACAU Plan".

The launch was held at the Services Platform Complex for Commercial and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (aka Forum Macao Complex) in Sai Van.

DSED Deputy Director Cheang Hio Man said in a speech during the launch that the plan aims to establish a brand image with Macau characteristics for local products. She added that the policy direction is designed to assist local enterprises in expanding into markets outside Macau, and to support the development of new business models such as cross-border e-commerce.

By creating a collective brand with a strong Macau identity, Cheang said the plan would help Macau-made, processed, or designed products, as well as live-streaming influencers be



Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSED) Deputy Director Cheang Hio Man delivers a speech during yesterday's launch at the Forum Macao Complex in Sai Van.

ready to expand beyond Macau. The initiative intends to enhance their image and recognition in markets other than Macau, strengthen consumer confidence, tell the Macau story effectively to audiences outside Macau, and broaden overseas business opportunities for local products and services.

DSED Economic Cooperation

Division Chief Lo Tsz Man introduced the plan in some detail during the launch.

Lo underlined that the bureau has established a review committee for the plan, which will evaluate product applications based on criteria such as the respective enterprise, brand, production capacity, output volume, and the feasibility or potential



DSED Economic Cooperation Division Chief Lo Tsz Man introduces the "MARCA+MACAU Plan" during yesterday's launch ceremony. - Photos: Armando Neves

for development in markets outside Macau. For live-streaming influencers, selection will be based on experience, character, and public image, she said.

In terms of product requirements, Lo also noted that priority will be given to products that are made or designed in Macau, adding that products owned by Macau

enterprises under their own brands, but manufactured or outsourced for production in the Greater Bay Area (GBA), may also apply.

As for promotional methods, Lo noted that once the brands have been selected, they will be promoted online via the bureau's official website <https://macaosignature.dsedt.gov.mo>.

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Children perform a traditional dragon and lion dance at a kindergarten in Taizhou, Jiangsu Province, yesterday. International Children's Day was celebrated across the country yesterday. - Xinhua

Iran truce on the rocks as Guards threaten 'new fronts'

TEHRAN - Negotiations to end the Mideast war appeared in deep trouble yesterday, with Iran's Revolutionary Guards threatening to open new fronts in the conflict hours after the US and Iran exchanged overnight strikes.

Iran's news agency Tasnim reported Tehran had suspended dialogue with mediators in protest at Israel's expanding offensive in Lebanon.

Speaking to US broadcaster NBC, President Donald Trump said "I think it's fine if they're done talking", adding that Tehran had not told Washington it was suspending negotiations.

Weeks of indirect talks marked by threats

and several waves of air strikes have so far failed to bring about an end to the war or the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, the key shipping channel for Gulf oil and gas.

The latest exchange of fire coincided with Israel expanding its ground offensive in Lebanon, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowing to push deeper into the country and instructing his military to strike "terror targets" in a south Beirut district.

Israel's Arabic-language spokesman posted on X that residents of Dahiyeh should evacuate "to preserve their safety", and AFP images showed huge traffic jams as residents tried to flee. (More on p.10)

- AFP

China ready to work with Brazil to further expand overall China-Latin America cooperation: Wang Yi

- Story on p. 7

Lebanon's Beaufort castle, a strategic landmark seized by Israel

Israeli soldiers have captured a crusader-era castle in southern Lebanon that has for centuries withstood invasions and battles, seizing once more a strategic landmark they once occupied for nearly two decades.

- Story on p. 10

Pro-Trump lawyer, leftist senator launch Colombia runoff campaigns

A hard-right Donald Trump fan and a leftist senator yesterday threw themselves into campaigning for Colombia's presidential runoff, a day after leading a first-round vote dominated by drug-related guerrilla violence.

- Story on p. 12

Grandmother, granddaughter hit by motorbike: PSP

Armando Neves

A spokesman for the Public Security Police (PSP) confirmed to the *Post* by phone yesterday evening that a grandmother and her granddaughter were injured in a collision involving a motorbike.

The spokesman identified the rider as a local male in his fifties working for a local university who passed a breathalyser test.

According to the spokesman, the two victims are local residents, aged 61 and 5 respectively. Both suffered contusions to their hands and feet, and were in stable condition when they were taken to the hospital.

The incident occurred at around 8:00 a.m. yesterday when the grandmother and granddaughter were walking across a zebra crossing in front of Vang Kei Supermarket on Avenida do Ouvidor Arriaga (雅廉訪大馬路). Both were hit by the motorcycle.

The spokesman said that the rider was fined based on Article 37, Paragraph 2 of Macau's Road Traffic Law, according to which when a driver or rider approaches a marked pedestrian crossing where vehicle traffic is not regulated by traffic lights or an officer, the driver must reduce speed and, if necessary, stop in order to allow pedestrians crossing the road to pass. The

rider faces a fine between 600 and 2,500 patacas.

The spokesman did not elaborate on the fine the culprit was ordered to pay.

The spokesman also said that the grandmother said that she would hold the rider legally accountable for the incident.

Yesterday morning's incident happened just four days after a 10-year-old boy was knocked down and run over by a seven-seater while walking across a zebra crossing on Wednesday night last week. He was pronounced dead at Kiang Wu Hospital shortly after the fatal traffic accident. The driver, who failed to slow down and brake, faces a negligent homicide charge, according to a PSP spokesman last week. If found guilty, the driver could be imprisoned for up to five years. ■



The official logo of Public Security Police (PSP)

MGP Museum marks 5th anniversary with free admission, new exhibits

Khalel Vallo

The Macau Grand Prix Museum (MGPM) in Zape celebrated the fifth anniversary of its post-expansion inauguration yesterday, welcoming visitors with free admission, special activities and the debut of a full-scale Formula 4 race car model as part of efforts to promote motorsport culture and strengthen Macau's "tourism + sports" development, according to a statement by the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO).

The museum commemorated the milestone with a slew of anniversary activities, the statement said, adding that MGTO Director Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes and Deputy Director Jennifer Si Tou visited the museum to observe public participation in the celebrations and learn more about visitor experiences.

According to the statement, visitors "enjoyed" complimentary admission yesterday and explored the museum's collection of motorsports memorabilia and interactive installations.

Activities included photo opportunities with MGTO mascot Mak Mak and participation in the interactive game "Lens Hunter: Code Breaker Adventure", which has been designed to introduce visitors to the history and culture of the Macau Grand Prix (MGP), the statement noted.

In order to mark the anniversary, museumgoers were also invited to contribute stickers to create a large installation featuring the number "5",* symbolising the museum's fifth year of operation following its expansion and reopening on June 1, 2021, the statement added.



This handout photo provided by the Macau Government Tourism Office yesterday shows museumgoers visiting the Macau Grand Prix Museum (MGPM) in Zape.

A day earlier, the museum organised the "Legendary Senna - F3 Racing Woodcraft Wooden Model Workshop", where participants assembled wooden replicas inspired by the Formula 3 race car driven by late Brazilian racer Ayrton Senna (1960-1994), the statement highlighted.

Another highlight of the anniversary celebrations was the launch of a full-scale Formula 4 race car model for permanent display, the statement said, adding that the exhibit commemorates the debut of the Macau Formula 4 Race - FIA F4 World Cup at the 2025 Macau Grand Prix last year.

The model replicates the dimensions, aerodynamic design and structure of the second-generation Mygale Formula 4 car, allowing visitors to view the vehicle up close and gain a better understanding of modern entry-level formula racing, the statement pointed out.

According to MGTO, the museum has welcomed more than 600,000 visitors since its reopening. Last year, the museum recorded

164,461 visitors, while guided tour services were provided to 10,817 visitors across 694 groups, the statement said, noting that in the first five months of this year, the museum received 67,001 visitors.

The museum has also continued to expand its educational role through its Educational Tour Course programme, which combines guided tours and learning activities to deepen students' understanding of the MGP and motorsport culture.

The statement said that the museum remains an important platform for preserving and promoting the legacy of the Macau Grand Prix while supporting Macau's development as a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure. ■

* In Chinese numerology, the number 5 (五) is a highly auspicious and foundational number. It signifies balance, wholeness, and the natural order of the universe, as well as the five traditional blessings - wealth, health, longevity, virtue, and a peaceful death. - Gemini

26th Lotus-fest to bloom across Macau & Hengqin

Khalel Vallo

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) announced in a statement on Friday that the 26th Macao Lotus Flower Festival will be held from June 12 (next Friday) to July 17, featuring more than 9,000 pots of lotus flowers to be displayed across Macau, apart from a raft of exhibitions, workshops and eco-tour activities designed to celebrate the city's official flower.

Held under the theme "Lotus Filling Macao with Joy", this year's festival will showcase the lotus variety *Nelumbo nucifera* "Xingfen"* as its thematic flower, the statement said, adding that the cultivar is known for its peach-shaped pink buds

that gradually open into light pink blossoms edged with bright red.

The statement noted that more than 20 lotus varieties will be displayed throughout different districts of Macau, underlining that the festival's main exhibition venue will be located along Avenida da Praia in Taipa, where landscape installations incorporating bamboo-inspired structures and artificial stone sculptures will be arranged to create an immersive flower-viewing experience.

The statement said that the exhibition aims to combine the symbolism of lotus culture with Macau's East-meets-West character, providing visitors with opportunities

for sightseeing, photography and leisure activities.

Beyond the main venue, around 9,000 pots of lotus flowers and more than 11,000 pots of seasonal flowers and shrubs will be placed throughout the city, the statement highlighted.

In addition, major display locations include Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro, the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Ruins of St. Paul's, and Lou Lim Ioc Garden, the statement said, adding that this year's edition will also continue its collaboration with the Hengqin Lotus Flower Festival. The latter will be held from June 26 to July 10.

According to the statement, both Macau and Hengqin will feature the same thematic flower, highlighting cultural and tourism cooperation between the neighbouring cities while promoting the heritage and symbolism of the lotus.

A series of supporting activities will accompany the festival, including lotus appreciation eco-tours, a Hengqin lotus eco-tour, lotus-themed parent-child culinary workshops, mobile phone photography workshops focused on lotus flowers, planting activities for children and other lotus-themed workshops, the statement said.

The annual festival aims to

combine floral displays, cultural experiences and educational activities while encouraging residents and visitors to explore different districts of Macau during the early summer blooming season, the statement noted.

The festival will run through July 17, with activities taking place at venues across the city. ■

*The name "Xingfen" translates literally to "Apricot Pink" or "Pink Beige" in Chinese, a direct reference to the unique, delicate colouration of its petals. Unlike standard lotus flowers that display vivid pink or stark white hues, "Xingfen" is prized for its soft, pastel gradient - blending a gentle pink with warm, subtle beige undertones. - Gemini



This poster provided by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) on Friday promotes its upcoming 26th Macao Lotus Flower Festival slated to start next Friday.

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Macau Weather

VERY HOT.
CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY PERIODS.
ONE OR TWO SHOWERS.
FORCE 2 TO 4 SOUTH TO SOUTHWESTERLY WINDS.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 70% AND 95%.



27°C~32°C

Source: SMG

Raft of activities set for 'China Cultural and Natural Heritage Day'

Rui Pastorin

Free admission workshops, exhibitions and guided tours are set to be held across various Macau World Heritage Sites and cultural facilities for the upcoming "China Cultural and Natural Heritage Day", with registration for the events open.

Cultural and Natural Heritage Day is celebrated annually on the Second Saturday of June. This year, it falls on June 13.

According to a recent statement from the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), the "3D Dragon Boat Painting Workshop" at The House of Macao Literature, the "Wormwood Herbal Hammer Workshop" at the Mandarin's House, the "Chinese Bonsai Workshop" and the "Fortune and Glory" Gold Leaf Art Workshop at the Lou Kau Mansion, are among the various workshops scheduled.

In terms of thematic exhibitions, these include the ongoing "VIEW INTO THE GREAT HAN – The Exhibition of Exquisite Cultural Relics from the Han Dynasty in Xuzhou" at the Macau Museum, the "Duet of Nature: Ming and Qing Landscape Paintings from the National Museum of China" at the Macau Museum of Art (MAM), and "City in Rephotography* – Exhibition

of Historical Photographs from the Archives of Macao" at the Archives of Macao, the statement said.

The statement added that the "Visiting the Ruins of St. Paul's in Space and Time—Exhibition of Virtual Reality at the Ruins of St. Paul's" will have free sessions from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. during weekends this month.

Meanwhile, free entrance, with some featuring guided tours, will also be available at various World Heritage Sites and cultural facilities on select weekends this month, starting with the Guia Lighthouse 10:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. on June 13 and 14, along with the Senado Library and the Chinese Ancient Books Chamber of the Sir Robert Ho Tung Library on the same period.

Some sessions require pre-registration via the Macao One Account on activity.mo.gov.mo/activity-h5/activity-list-web. More details are on www.icm.gov.mo/chd. ■

* *Rephotography is a specific technical term used in photography, history, and geography. It refers to the act of taking a photograph of a place or subject that has already been photographed before, from the exact same vantage point, to show changes over time (often referred to as "then-and-now" photography).* – Gemini



This undated and unlocated handout photo recently provided by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) shows participants during an activity held during a previous China Cultural and Natural Heritage Day.

'MARCA + MACAU Plan' aims to expand external business opportunities for local products & services

Continued from p.1

The local government will endorse the selected Macau brands, certifying them as high-quality Macau products and services, thereby dispelling any possible doubts in external markets about the authenticity of Macau brands and strengthening brand credibility, Lo emphasised. She added that, offline, a raft of events will be organised to take the brands overseas.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines, Lo said that the project is currently in its launch phase, expecting that the first batch of "MARCA+MACAU MacaoSignature" will be selected in the fourth quarter of this year.

Although a fixed annual application mechanism has not yet been finalised, the initial plan is to open applications once a year, Lo said. She also said that the bureau will review the scheme based on its outcomes, and further application rounds may be opened in the future, though they may not necessarily take place on a regular annual basis.

Lo also said that initially 20 local businesses and 10 influencers will be selected by the bureau's review committee. Asked by reporters, she declined to reveal how much financial support the 30 "lucky ones" could expect.

"Marca" is Portuguese for "brand" or "label". ■

Half of locals call for stronger training for childcare workers: survey

Staff Reporter

The findings of a survey about Macau's childcare services released yesterday show that nearly half of this survey's respondents expressed a desire for strengthened professional training for childcare workers in the city's crèches.

The survey was carried out between January and last month by the Macau Federation of Trade Unions (commonly known as Gung Luen in Cantonese), which held a press conference at a Gung Luen service centre in Fai Chi Kei district yesterday to announce the survey's findings.

The survey collected 1,233 valid questionnaires from local residents aged 18 or above.

According to the press conference, the survey's findings show that 64 percent of the respondents said that in terms of various aspects of childcare services, they value the affection and sense of responsibility delivered by childcare workers above all else.

The survey's findings also show that nearly half of the respondents said that they support the government's proposal to raise the number of days for statutory paid maternity leave in the private sector to 90 days from the current 70 days, so as to ensure a smooth transition towards the period when



Gung Luen Vice President Ella Lei Cheng I (centre), Leong Meng Ian (right), who heads the federation's Women's Committee, and Choi Cheng Tong, the survey's researcher, address yesterday's press conference at a Gung Luen service centre in Fai Chi Kei district. Lei is a member of the Legislative Assembly (AL).

– Photo: Gung Luen

parents can start sending their babies to a crèche.

Moreover, the survey's findings show that 55 percent of the respondents said that they want a further increase in the amount of the government's childcare allowance, which currently stands at 18,000 patacas a year.

The survey also asked the respondents how much it costs to take care of their babies. According to its findings, 45.7 percent of the respondents said that it cost them between 3,000 and 6,000 patacas per month to take care of their baby, while 34.2 percent said that it costs them between 6,000 and 9,000 patacas per month.

The findings show that 14.1

percent of the respondents said that it costs them 9,000 patacas or more to take care of their baby, while the remaining six percent said that it costs them 3,000 patacas or less per month.

In addition, the survey's findings show that 33.7 percent of the respondents said that they were satisfied with the city's childcare services, while 9.2 percent said that they were very satisfied.

According to the findings, 48.3 percent of the respondents gave the answer "neutral", i.e., neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, while 7.1 percent and 1.8 percent said that they were dissatisfied and very dissatisfied respectively with the city's childcare services. ■

IP run aims to boost Macau-Hengqin exchange, cultural and tourism economy: EZGO chief

Armindo Neves

EZGO Sports Development Co., Ltd.* hosted a two-day event titled "Pleasant Goat and Big Big Wolf IP Run Hengqin" at Hengqin Bay Hotel this past weekend.

Winnie Cheng (程韋莉), director of EZGO, said in a speech on the sidelines of the run that last year's event proved highly popular with families and couples. Cheng added that this year's event had been expanded into a two-day fun run and carnival, aiming to create a unique cultural, tourism, and sports experience for Hengqin and Macau, while promoting cross-regional exchange and the development of the cultural tourism economy.

According to a statement released by the company, the fun run featured a 1.5-kilometre course offering views of the Macau seascape. The event championed a parent-child interactive concept of "zero competition, focused on togetherness", with no rankings or timing, the statement said.

The carnival section featured a new Children's Day-themed party, a costume contest, multiple rounds of prize draws, game booths, parent-child workshops, food and cultural-creative stalls, and a water play party, the statement noted. It added that the intellectual property (IP) characters Pleasant Goat and Big Big Wolf** also

made appearances to interact with participants. ■

*EZGO Sports Development Co., Ltd. is a sports management and event organisation company with a significant presence in Macau and the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin. It focuses on youth sports development, event coordination, and the sale of specialised sports equipment. Its activities fall into three categories: youth sports training, event management, and retail and equipment. The company regards itself as a "bridge" between Macau and the Chinese mainland, maintaining offices in both jurisdictions. – DeepSeek

**Pleasant Goat and Big Big Wolf (Xi Yang Yang yu Hui Tai Lang) is a long-running Chinese animated television series created by Huang Weiming and produced by Creative Power Entertaining. It is a humorous animated battle of wits between predator and prey, with no permanent harm done. It has become one of the most successful and beloved Chinese animated franchises since its debut in 2005, spawning over 2,000 TV episodes, feature films, comics, merchandise, theme park attractions, and stage plays. It is widely considered a defining work of modern Chinese animation. – DeepSeek



Fun run participants reach the finish line at "Pleasant Goat and Big Big Wolf IP Run Hengqin" at Hengqin Bay Hotel on Sunday. – Photo Courtesy of EZGO Sports Development Co., Ltd.



Sophie Leong offers 'wonderland' journey at 10 Fantasia

Rui Pastorin

At the 10 Fantasia gallery on Calçada da Igreja de S. Lázaro (瘋堂斜巷), a solo exhibition by Macau artist Sophie Leong takes exhibitiongoers through a world of art with layered meanings.

Introducing the Macau-born artist's art style, a recent statement from the gallery said that her work combines dark, opulent, and fantasy themes while incorporating mixed-media, adding that they integrate storytelling with cultural symbolism.

For this exhibition, aptly titled "Sophie's Adventures in Wonderland", visitors to 10 Fantasia's "Youth Artist Exhibition Room" in the basement are invited on a journey between reality and imagination across three sections. These are namely the "Love Poetry Series", the "Demonic Temptation Series", and the "Story Series".

The "Love Poetry Series" sees works created through

mixed media, among which are roses, tulle, lace and mesh, with a statement at the gallery noting that the items can be worn as brooches. According to the statement, the use of mixed media represents elements of love including purity, fragility, seduction and constraint, while being able to wear the pieces as brooches signifies "intimacy and the internalisation of love".

Paintings and art books meanwhile take centre stage in the "The Demonic Temptation Series", visualising what the statement calls "moments of moral seduction through seven demons representing seven deadly sins".

The list of Christianity's seven deadly sins comprises pride, envy, wrath, gluttony, lust, sloth, and greed.

The statement said that beauty masks the demons' true nature, confronting viewers with desire and inner darkness.

The last of the sections, the "Story Series", meanwhile

takes inspiration from religion, fairy tales, films and social issues.

Introducing the artist, Leong, the director of the 1874 Gallery in China's Taiwan region, is described by the statement as having a practice that "bridges academic research and artistic creation", highlighting her academic career and qualifications, which includes a Ph.D. in Design from Tatung University in Taiwan.

She has presented papers at international platforms, while her works have been exhibited in Amsterdam, Barcelona, Hong Kong, Kaohsiung, London, Macau, Shanghai, Taipei, and Venice, according to the statement.

The exhibition is organised by the Macau Youth Art Association and is on through June 27. Throughout the remainder of the exhibition period, members of the public may view the pieces on show from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. from Tuesdays to Sundays. It is closed on Mondays.

-Photos: Rui Pastorin



Police nab deliveryman for sexually harassing restaurant worker twice



This undated handout photo released by the Public Security Police (PSP) yesterday shows a police officer escorting the sexual harassment suspect to a police station in Zape. This police station was previously the PSP headquarters, which was relocated to Taipa's Pac On district in September 2024.

Tony Wong

A local man in his sixties has been arrested for sexually harassing a female worker at a restaurant on two separate occasions last month while delivering raw food to its kitchen, a Public Security Police (PSP) spokesperson said during a regular press conference yesterday.

The man surnamed Wong works as a deliveryman for a company supplying raw food to local restaurants.

The victim is a non-resident worker (NRWs) in her twenties who works at the restaurant on Rua de Coelho do Amaral (連勝街), the main street running from Luís de Camões Garden to the private Kiang Wu Hospital.

On May 18, Wong delivered raw food to the restaurant, where he hugged the victim from behind and touched her breasts. Terrified, the victim did not report the case to the police at that time.

However, Wong touched the victim's breasts again on Wednesday last week while delivering raw food again. This time, the victim reported the matter to her employer, who then raised the issue with the suspect's company. The victim reported the case to the police that night.

After reviewing the eatery's CCTV footage and the citywide CCTV network, the police identified Wong, and intercepted him in the street in Patane district on Thursday morning last week.

Under questioning, Wong admitted to sexually harassing the female worker at the eatery twice.

Wong has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing a sexual harassment charge.

According to Article 164-A of the Macau Penal Code, sexual harassment is punishable by a prison term of up to one year. ■

Casino takings rise 6.7 pct to 22.6 billion patacas in May

Staff Reporter

Macau's 20 casinos generated gross gaming revenue (GGR) of 22.6 billion patacas last month, marking a year-on-year increase of 6.7 percent, the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ) announced yesterday.

Month-on-month, May's GGR rose by 13.6 percent, from April's 19.89 billion patacas.

May produced the local casino sector's third lowest monthly GGR in the first five months of the year and its third lowest year-on-year growth rate, after February's 4.5 percent and April's 5.5 percent.

Between January and May, GGR rose year-on-year by 10.9 percent to 108.3 billion patacas.

Macau's government-concessioned gaming industry is operated by six rival integrated resort (IR) operators: Sands, Galaxy, SJM, Melco, Wynn, and MGM. Under their concession agreements with the government, they are required to enhance their non-gaming attractions and support the promotion of Macau's cultural heritage and old-quarter

renewal projects. The operators pay 35 percent of their GGR as a direct gaming tax to the government, along with an additional 5.0 percent in levies to fund various public causes.

As of the end of the first quarter, the six operators ran a total of 20 casinos, a 52.4 percent decrease from the peak of 42 casinos in 2021. This decline is primarily due to a government-ordered consolidation of the gaming industry, which included an official ban on so-called "satellite casinos" operated by third-party enterprises (junkets) in collaboration with gaming concessionaires.

During the gaming industry's three-year consolidation process, which officially ended on December 31, 2025, the gaming tables and slot machines from shuttered satellite casinos, along with their local employees, were transferred to casinos directly run by the gaming concessionaires.

Currently, SJM and Sands own five casinos each, Galaxy and Melco operate three each, while Wynn and MGM run two each.

According to the latest available

DICJ statistics, baccarat accounted for 85.2 percent of local casinos' GGR across their 16 games of chance at the end of this year's first quarter. In comparison, roulette, Europe's classic game of chance, generated a mere 0.49 percent of GGR.

At the end of the first quarter, Macau's casinos operated 6,000 gaming tables and 12,000 gaming machines, according to the inspectorate overseeing the city's "dragon-head" industry.

Macau's officially concessioned casino industry got off the ground in 1849.

According to the latest available data from the Statistics and Census Bureau (DSEC), the number of persons engaged in the gaming sector amounted to 53,272 at the end of last year, accounting for 10.7 percent of Macau's total labour force of 496,600 around that time (Dec 2025-Feb 2026).

In December, according to DSEC figures, the average earnings (excluding irregular remuneration) of the gaming sector's full-time employees stood at 28,020 patacas. ■



A Long March-12B Y1 carrier rocket blasts off from the Dongfeng commercial space innovation pilot zone in northwest China yesterday. The rocket blasted off at 4:40 p.m., sending a group of networking satellites for the Qianfan Constellation into their preset orbits. — Xinhua

Teen nabbed for defrauding gambler of 87,000 yuan with prop banknotes

Tony Wong

The Judiciary Police (PJ) announced yesterday that a 17-year-old male from the Chinese mainland has been arrested for using prop* HK dollar banknotes to defraud a male gambler out of 87,000 yuan (equivalent to about 103,000 patacas) under the guise of money exchange.

The police said that after making a money transfer to an account, the victim realised something was amiss and, with the help of hotel security guards, intercepted the suspect, surnamed Fang, as he attempted to flee. The police arrived at the scene, arrested the teenager, and yesterday were still trying to track down his at-large accomplices.

PJ spokesman Cheong Un Hong announced the case's details during a special press conference yesterday.

On Sunday afternoon, the victim needed cash in HK dollars so he used a social media app to contact an individual claiming to offer currency exchange services. The two parties

agreed to exchange 87,000 yuan for HK\$100,000 in cash and arranged to meet for the transaction at a hotel food court in Cotai.

Upon arrival at the hotel food court, Fang quickly pulled out two stacks of "HK\$1,000 banknotes" (actually prop banknotes) from his trouser pocket, totalling 200 notes. During the transaction, Fang refused to let the victim verify the banknotes on the spot, using the excuse that he "needed to confirm the bank transfer had been cleared first", and demanded that the victim transfer the money beforehand. Unaware of the deception, the victim transferred 87,000 yuan to a mainland account specified by Fang.

Once Fang confirmed receipt of the transfer, he immediately attempted to flee. Sensing that something was wrong, the victim instantly called for assistance from hotel security. Security guards moved swiftly to catch Fang.

PJ officers seized the two stacks of prop banknotes from Fang,

which consisted of 200 counterfeit HK\$1,000 notes. An examination revealed that the entire batch of counterfeit notes bore identical serial numbers. The texture of the paper, print colours, ink lustre, and feel were completely inconsistent with genuine banknotes. They lacked any security features such as watermarks, security threads, colour-shifting ink, or intaglio printing, and were clearly printed with the word "PROP", indicating that they were low-quality prop money.

The police confirmed that Fang was not carrying any genuine HK dollar banknotes or other cash. They also seized a smartphone from Fang.

Under questioning, Fang admitted that "someone" promised to give him a reward of 10,000 yuan if he succeeded to defraud gamblers with the prop banknotes.

The police believe that other accomplices involved in the case remain at large.

Fang has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP),

facing a fraud charge. ■

*Prop banknotes (also referred to as prop money, stage money, or motion picture play money) are non-legal tender replicas of paper currency designed specifically for use in film, television, theatre, commercials, and

other entertainment media. While they look authentic on camera or from a distance, they are legally required to carry distinct physical and visual differences from real currency to prevent counterfeiting and fraud. — Gemini



The 200 prop HK dollar banknotes and the smartphone seized from the suspect are displayed at the pressroom of the PJ headquarters yesterday. — Photo: PJ

China's security vision resonates at Shangri-La Dialogue

Analysis

SINGAPORE – The Shangri-La Dialogue 2026, Asia's premier defense and security summit, concluded in Singapore on Sunday amid intensifying geopolitical tensions, expanding military activities and growing security uncertainties in the world.

Discussions at the three-day summit underscored mounting concerns that the expansion of bloc-based security arrangements and external interference are undermining regional stability and deepening strategic mistrust.

At the same time, many participants emphasized the importance of centrality and dialogue among members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in maintaining regional peace and stability.

In this context, China's vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security, as outlined in the Global Security Initiative (GSI), has drawn growing attention from regional experts and observers as an alternative approach to addressing mounting security challenges.

JAPAN'S MILITARY SHIFT DRAWS SCRUTINY

At the dialogue on Sunday, Japanese Defense Minister Shinjiro Koizumi claimed that Japan would further expand cooperation with regional countries in defense equipment and military technology, drawing renewed concerns about Tokyo's ongoing military buildup and expanding security footprint.

Koizumi's speech came as Japan continues to accelerate a major shift in its post-war security posture through increased defense spending and the relaxation of restrictions on arms exports.

Observers noted that Tokyo's latest move has fueled concerns among regional countries that Japan is moving further away from its long-held pacifist orientation and toward a more assertive military role.

Japan's accelerating military buildup deserves scrutiny from its regional neighbors and the broader international community, said Eng Kok Thay, a secretary of state of Cambodia's Council of Ministers.

These moves could accelerate Japan's military expansion, increase tensions in the Asia-Pacific, and provoke an arms race that threatens regional stability, he warned.

Kiyoshi Sugawa, senior research fellow at the East Asian Community Institute of Japan, said that by allowing greater flexibility in arms exports, including potential exports to countries involved in conflicts, Japan risks abandoning the image it has cultivated as a peaceful nation since the end of World War II.

'SMALL-CIRCLE' DIPLOMACY FUELS TENSIONS

Also at the dialogue, Philippine

Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro framed the Philippines as a "guardian of the freedom of the seas," touting its expanding maritime security cooperation with multiple partners.

However, analysts noted that Manila's latest moves reflect a broader pattern of bloc-based security arrangements that is reshaping the regional security landscape.

The Philippines and Japan have deepened their security collusion, while doubling down on exclusionary "small-circle" diplomacy.

The Philippines is also seeking external forces to embolden itself in its infringements and provocations in the South China Sea, while attempting to shift blame onto China.

The fundamental reason why the Philippines has been able to continue its provocations is that it is "backed by powerful supporters," including the United States and Japan, said Salawati Binti Mat Basir, a legal advisor at the National University of Malaysia.

The growing reliance on military intervention and unilateral actions is eroding confidence in the UN-centered international order, international law, and multilateral mechanisms, said Tang Shi Xuan, a researcher at the Huayan Policy Institute under the Malaysia-based think tank Center for Malaysian Chinese Studies.

A PILLAR OF REGIONAL STABILITY

Amid growing security concerns, some regional leaders at the dialogue have called for a broader vision of security centered on development and cooperation.

In a speech at the dialogue, Vietnamese President To Lam said that sustainable security cannot rely on military expansion or arms competition, but must be grounded in development, connectivity and cooperative frameworks.

He further underscored ASEAN's responsibility to ensure that regional competition does not escalate into confrontation.

ASEAN Secretary-General Kao Kim Hourn highlighted the bloc's role as a stabilizing force and its continued efforts to promote dialogue, cooperation and a rules-based regional architecture.

He also stressed its commitment to upholding ASEAN centrality and unity, fostering inclusive cooperation and strengthening regional resilience.

Jose Ramos-Horta, Timor-Leste's president, depicted ASEAN as a successful model of regional cooperation, saying the bloc's experience shows that sustained diplomacy, consensus-building and practical cooperation can help prevent conflict, strengthen interdependence and promote lasting peace.

Disputes should be resolved through dialogue and regional mechanisms, not external interference, said Viridika Rizky Utama, executive director of the

Jakarta-based think tank PARA Syndicate. By reinforcing ASEAN centrality, regional countries can preserve stability and autonomy, he said.

A VISION PRIORITIZES COOPERATION

Amid rising security challenges, the China-proposed GSI has gained growing support from international observers as an effective response to rising global instability at the event.

The China-proposed GSI and the Global Governance Initiative offer Chinese wisdom and Chinese solutions for the international community in responding to global challenges, said Meng Xiangqing, head of the Chinese People's Liberation Army expert delegation and a professor at China's National Defense University.

The initiatives uphold multilateralism and the rule of law in international affairs, providing important ideas and solutions for addressing global challenges, he said.

US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said a new vision of building a constructive US-China relationship of strategic stability, as agreed by the two heads of state during their recent summit in Beijing, is "meaningful for the history of peace in the region and the world."

The new positioning for US-China ties is real, substantive, and meaningful for the history of peace in the region and the world, he said while responding to a question from a member of the Chinese delegation at the dialogue.

Meanwhile, experts from regional countries agreed that the GSI is gaining increasing relevance amid global turbulence.

China's consistent call for common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security under the GSI offers a constructive alternative framework to the bloc-based alliance that is currently driving regional tensions, said Kok Thay.

The GSI does not ask countries to choose sides or sacrifice independence, Utama said. Instead, it offers a platform where nations can pursue security collectively, without being locked into zero-sum calculations, which has become particularly appealing for countries in the Global South.

The GSI broadens the concept of security beyond military affairs to include energy security, food security, public health, technological security, and supply chain stability, noted Tharakorn Wusatirakul, president of the BRI Institute of Research Development on Economic and Education in Thailand.

This reflects the view that development and security are inseparable, making the initiative more responsive to the complex challenges of the contemporary world, he said. —Xinhua

A woman's reading revolution from trekking for books to modern library

Analysis

LHASA – While accompanying her children reading in a modern, fully digital library, Tsering Yangqen, 39, often closes her eyes and recalls her own childhood, a time when reading was a luxury.

Tsering Yangqen, of the Monba ethnic group, hails from Medog County in China's southwestern Xizang Autonomous Region. Besieged by high hills and primitive forests in a deep valley in the Himalayas, Medog was the only Chinese county that was not accessible through highway until 2013.

Monday marks International Children's Day. With transport infrastructure having improved and ended the county's isolation, children can now go to school by vehicle and read at a smart library on their doorstep, bidding farewell to the bookless, roadless past.

Born into a farmer's family in 1987, Tsering Yangqen remembers endless chores: carrying firewood, hauling grass, tending cattle and pounding rice. What she loved most was going to school, not just to learn, but also to escape the farm work.

She recalled that in primary school, there was often only one textbook for the whole class, which belonged to the teacher. The teacher wrote the texts on the blackboard, allowing the students to copy everything into their notebooks.

When she grew older, students like her had to climb over the mountains through rain and mud to bring textbooks back to their school. The journey to the nearest town took three to four days.

"Our rubber boots would get soaked through and our feet would be left rotten and sore. But we didn't dare to stop, because stopping would hurt even more, let alone the risks of mudslides," she recalled, adding that they had to spend the night in simple roadside shelters along the way.

When the books finally arrived, the students felt happy. "At least we finally had books," she said.

Despite the childhood hardships, Tsering Yangqen considers herself fortunate because her family supported her education.

The situation changed significantly following the opening

of the Medog Highway in October 2013, with vehicles and machines flowing in. Children can now go to schools equipped with better hardware and teaching resources, and have more books and much better reading conditions.

Tsering Yangqen has witnessed such changes. After graduating from college and working as a tour guide in the city of Nyingchi, she returned to her hometown as a public servant.

In 2023, she helped with the planning and development of the Lotus Book House, a modern public library that opened with support from the paired assistance program between the city of Foshan, in south China's Guangdong Province, and Medog.

The 400-square-meter library now houses more than 10,000 books, including children's literature, science books and those related to Xizang and Medog. It has quickly become a popular cultural space for both local residents and tourists.

The library is equipped with digital services and self-service technology. Readers can enter, borrow, return, renew and search for books via a smartphone, and access digital resources from Foshan's library network thousands of kilometers away.

The Lotus Book House is a living example of Xizang's progress in public cultural services.

According to a white paper issued last year, the central government has since 2012 invested a total of 4.89 billion yuan in developing public cultural services across the region. By the end of 2024, Xizang was home to 82 libraries, 43 museums and 43 memorial halls, among other cultural facilities. Mobile libraries currently serve all 74 county-level areas, with smart libraries and digital public culture platforms having been rolled out.

Now, Tsering Yangqen is a mother of two. Her elder daughter is in middle school and her younger one is in primary school. She has bought many books for them, and often brings them to the library on weekends.

"I hope the children can develop a life-long habit of reading and receive a better education than we had," she said. —Xinhua



David Firestein, president and CEO of the George H. W. Bush Foundation for US-China Relations, speaks at the China Institute of America Centennial Gala in New York City last Thursday. —Xinhua

Vice President Han meets Brazilian FM

BEIJING – Vice President Han Zheng met with Brazilian Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira in Beijing yesterday.

Noting the building of the China-Brazil community with a shared future has been steadily and continuously advanced under the strategic guidance of the two countries' heads of state, Han said China has always viewed and developed bilateral relations from a strategic height and a long-term perspective.

China is willing to work with Brazil to implement the important consensus reached by the two heads of state, promote high-level strategic coordination, and demonstrate the responsibility of a major country in safeguarding the interests of developing countries at large and promoting common development, said Han.

Pointing out that practical cooperation between China and Brazil is highly complementary and enjoys strong internal driving force, Han said both sides should give better play to the role of mechanisms such as the China-Brazil High-level Coordination and Cooperation Committee to work for a bigger share of science and technology in cooperation, with higher added value and of greater strategic significance.

Vieira said at present, multilateralism is suffering an unprecedented blow, and it is particularly important for Brazil and China to deepen the construction of the community of a shared future. Brazil is ready to work with China to jointly ensure the coordinating role of the high-level coordination and cooperation committee and deepen cooperation in various fields, he added.

– Xinhua



Vice President Han Zheng (right) shakes hands with Brazilian Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira in Beijing yesterday. – Xinhua

China ready to work with Brazil to further expand overall China-Latin America cooperation: Wang Yi

BEIJING – China has always been a reliable friend to Latin American and Caribbean countries and stands ready to work with regional countries, including Brazil, to further deepen and expand overall China-Latin America cooperation, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, made the remarks during the fifth China-Brazil Foreign Ministerial-Level Comprehensive Strategic Dialogue with Brazilian Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira in Beijing.

Wang said that in recent years, under the strategic guidance of the two heads of state, China-Brazil relations have become increasingly global, strategic and far-reaching in influence.

“Practical cooperation across all fields has been steadily upgraded, and the two peoples have never been closer,” he added.

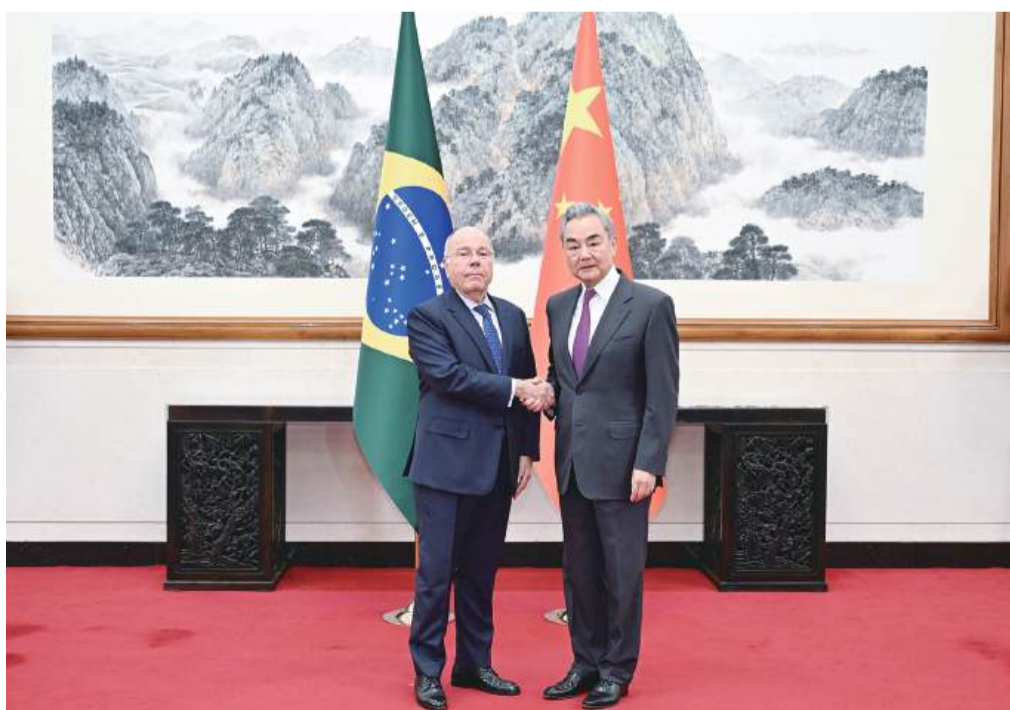
Wang said the two sides should fully implement the important consensus reached by the two heads of state, continue to advance the building of a China-Brazil community with a shared future, jointly counter various external challenges, and build greater synergy for each other's modernization drives and the unity and self-improvement of Global South countries.

Noting that China appreciates the Brazilian government's long-standing commitment to the one-China principle, Wang said China supports Brazil in safeguarding its national sovereignty, upholding independence and autonomy, and achieving greater development.

The two sides should advance exchanges and cooperation in culture, education, tourism, sports, sub-national areas, youth, media and other fields, Wang said, adding that it is important to strengthen communication and coordination under multilateral mechanisms including the United Nations and BRICS, earnestly implement the four major global initiatives, and promote the development of a more just and equitable global governance system.

Vieira stated that Brazil will always adhere to the one-China principle. He said Brazil looks forward to consolidating strategic mutual trust with China, deepening practical cooperation, cementing public support for bilateral ties, and achieving common prosperity.

Noting that both Brazil and China are important forces championing multilateralism and free trade, Vieira said Brazil is ready to work with China to enhance multilateral coordination, jointly advance the reform of the global governance system, uphold the authority of the United Nations, and promote international fairness and justice. – Xinhua



Foreign Minister Wang Yi (right), also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, shakes hands with Brazilian Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira in Beijing yesterday. – Xinhua

US should ensure legitimate rights, interests of Chinese journalists in US

BEIJING – China firmly opposes the United States' move, out of so-called “reciprocity,” to engage in political suppression against journalists from Xinhua News Agency working legally in the United States, foreign ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said yesterday.

Lin made the remarks at a regular news briefing when asked about *The New York Times*' assertion that its journalist was deported from China.

“During the time the journalist was stationed in China, she had a track record of deceiving people into unknowingly taking interviews, and violated the Regulations of the People's Republic of China on News Coverage by Permanent Offices of Foreign Media Organizations and Foreign Journalists. Her residence permit was thus revoked as dictated by laws and regulations,” Lin said.

The New York Times provided platform for Taiwan authorities to peddle separatist rhetoric for “Taiwan independence,” and blatantly called China's Taiwan region a “country.” This grossly violates the one-China principle and the three China-US joint communiques, and sends a gravely

wrong signal to “Taiwan independence” separatist forces. China firmly opposes it, Lin said.

“*The New York Times* should correct its wrongdoings rather than continue down the wrong path,” Lin noted.

The facts and merits of the issue of media between China and the US are clear. The root cause is the US side's unilaterally stirring up trouble, and politicizing issues related to media, Lin added.

China always provides facilitation for foreign journalists as they report and live in China. In recent years, China has shown flexibility and provided visa facilitation for quite a few US journalists coming to China to do reporting, whereas Chinese journalists' applications for reporting in the United States have rarely been approved, the spokesperson said.

“The US side should earnestly implement the understanding reached with China on media issues and take concrete actions to ensure the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese journalists who work and stay in the United States,” Lin said.

– Xinhua

China to send medical expert team to DR Congo for Ebola control

BEIJING – A team of Chinese medical experts will depart from Beijing in the early hours of today for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to support local Ebola control efforts, according to the National Health Commission (NHC) yesterday.

The Chinese government decided to send the high-level medical expert team after the World Health Organization determined on May 17 that the Ebola outbreak in the DRC constituted a “public health emergency of international concern.”

With rich experience in epidemic control, the experts will work with the Chinese medical team currently in the DRC and strengthen cooperation with local medical and epidemic control agencies to help contain the Ebola outbreak.

The expert team will also provide prevention and treatment training for local healthcare facilities, the Chinese medical team, the Chinese embassy, Chinese

enterprises and overseas Chinese citizens in the DRC.

The dispatch of this expert team underscores China's commitment to international cooperation in fighting the epidemic, said an NHC official, adding that the team will share epidemic response experience based on local conditions and help enhance the DRC's capacity for Ebola prevention, control and treatment.

Since the recent outbreak began, the 24th batch of the Chinese medical team currently in the DRC has activated an emergency response and established a prevention and control system, including conducting training and drills, coordinating supplies, and improving the team's living environment. Team members have remained on the clinical front lines to protect the health of both local people and Chinese nationals in the DRC.

– AFP

Philippine senator arrested in flood control scandal

MANILA – Philippine police arrested a lawmaker yesterday over a multi-billion dollar graft scandal, making him the highest-ranking government official held in the case that caused mass protests in the country.

Senator Jose “Jinggoy” Estrada’s detention came nearly a year after revelations over massive corruption in flood control projects – a matter with serious consequences in a country pummeled every year by major typhoons.

Several construction firm owners, government officials and politicians have been accused of pocketing funds from the projects, but this is the first time a sitting lawmaker was arrested over the scandal.

Estrada rejected the charges against him as “nonsense” and a ploy to get him to switch sides in a bitterly divided Senate.

A special anti-graft court ordered his arrest yesterday, days after Estrada, son of former Philippine president Joseph Estrada, was charged with plunder, defined in the Philippines as large-scale corruption.

Graft has long been a problem in the Philippines but the flood control case has stood out due to the sums involved.

A government prosecutor accused him of inserting flood control project allocations in the 2025 national budget that allowed him to amass a kickback of over 573 million pesos (US\$9.2 million).

Plunder is punishable by life imprisonment and defendants are not entitled to bail.



Philippines' Interior Secretary Jonvic Remulla (left) escorts Philippine Senator Jose Jinggy Estrada as he leaves for the national police headquarters to surrender after a warrant of arrest was served at the Senate building in Manila yesterday. – AFP

Estrada’s co-defendants include former Department of Public Works and Highways secretary Manuel Bonoan, as well as local engineering officials.

In a brief statement to the press before surrendering to police at the senate premises, Estrada described the charges as part of an attempt to blackmail him.

“There were many offers to drop the charges against me, but I did not entertain them,” he said. “What is at stake here is the independence of the senate,” he said without elaborating.

Estrada is a member of a group of 13 senators who took control of the 24-member Senate in May, ahead of the trial of their ally, impeached Vice President Sara Duterte, next month.

One other member of that group, Senator Ronald Dela Rosa, the chief

enforcer of the deadly drug war of the vice president’s father, ex-president Rodrigo Duterte, went into hiding last month after the International Criminal Court ordered his arrest.

Both Dela Rosa and the elder Duterte are accused of the crime against humanity of murder. The former president was arrested last year and handed over to the Netherlands-based tribunal.

Dela Rosa and Estrada’s absence from the Senate would prevent them from sitting as judges to the Senate trial of the younger Duterte, accused of graft, hiding unexplained wealth, and plotting to have former ally President Ferdinand Marcos assassinated.

Estrada was charged in 2014 with plundering millions of dollars meant for government development projects, but the court acquitted him a decade later. – AFP

Philippine VP Sara Duterte submits answer to defend impeachment charges

MANILA – The defense team of Sara Duterte said yesterday that the Philippine vice president had formally filed her answer to the Articles of Impeachment before the Senate, which is sitting as an impeachment court.

In a statement, Sara’s lawyers said the Answer sets forth the vice president’s defenses and raises significant constitutional, procedural, and substantive issues concerning the Articles of Impeachment and

proceedings before the Philippines’ House of Representatives (HOR) and HOR’s Committee on Justice.

Her lawyers said the matters raised in the Answer should be addressed before the impeachment court rather than through publicity.

On May 18, the Philippine Senate convened as an impeachment court to try the case against Sara. Senate President Alan Peter Cayetano ordered that a summons be issued to Sara, directing her to file her

answer within a non-extendible 10-day period from receipt of the summons and to appear before the Senate upon notice.

Sara, the daughter of former president Rodrigo Duterte, announced her candidacy for the 2028 Philippine presidential election in February this year. If more than two-thirds of senators vote in favor of the impeachment, she will be convicted, removed from office, and barred from holding public office for life. – Xinhua

Explosion kills 5 at S Korean aerospace plant

SEOUL – An explosion at a plant run by South Korean defence firm Hanwha Aerospace killed five people yesterday, local fire authorities said.

The explosion was reported to authorities at around 11:00 a.m. [local time] at Hanwha’s plant in Daejeon, about 150 kilometres south of Seoul.

A representative of the Daejeon Fire Headquarters told AFP that five people were killed and two others injured, without providing further details.

Hanwha Aerospace is a major South Korean defence manufacturer

which produces weapons, artillery systems and aerospace components.

Its Daejeon facility focuses on research and development, including advanced weapons technologies and space-related systems.

The blast may have happened during the cleaning process involved in the production of rocket propellants, Hanwha Aerospace CEO Son Jae-il said at a news briefing.

“During this process, explosive materials could remain on the tools, and there is a procedure to remove and clean those residues.

It is presumed that the accident occurred during this stage of the process,” he said.

“We will take this accident with the utmost seriousness and fundamentally review and rectify the company’s safety systems to ensure that such an incident is never repeated.”

Major political parties will refrain from using campaign songs and choreographed performances, as a sign of respect, during stumping ahead of tomorrow’s local elections. – AFP

Malaysia requires social media age checks barring under-16 accounts

Isabelle Leong

KUALA LUMPUR – Malaysia will require major social media platforms to verify users’ ages and bar children under 16 from registering accounts under new online safety rules that took effect yesterday.

The requirements apply to providers with at least eight million users in the Southeast Asian country – including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube.

But platforms will be given a grace period to implement the measures, the communications regulator has said, without specifying its duration.

The country is the latest to attempt to restrict young people’s access to social media platforms, as concern grows worldwide over their negative impact on child wellbeing.

From yesterday, “users below the age of 16 are not permitted to register for social media accounts”, according to an FAQ document released by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) before the new rules came in.

Platforms are expected to implement “age verification measures”, the FAQ said, including checks against government-issued records such as identity cards or passports.

The regulations under the country’s Online Safety Act – the new Child Protection Code and Risk Mitigation Code – also require “stronger content governance” on social media.

Platforms must “implement proactive and systemic measures to mitigate harmful content risks” such as “reporting and response mechanisms, advertiser verification measures and the labelling of manipulated content where appropriate”.

Failure to comply with the two codes could result in financial penalties for the companies of up to 10 million Malaysian ringgit (US\$2.5 million), the MCMC said.

Global reckoning

Australia in December became the first country to require TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat and other top sites to remove accounts held by under-16s, or face heavy fines.

However, three months since the landmark laws came into effect,

Australia’s online safety watchdog has found a “substantial proportion of Australian children” were still scrolling banned platforms.

Like in Canberra, Indonesia also placed the onus on platforms to regulate teen access, with a social media ban for under-16s enforced in March in a bid to protect some 70 million children from the threats of online pornography, cyberbullying and internet addiction.

The ban initially targeted eight “high risk” platforms – YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, Threads, X, Bigo Live, and Roblox.

All of the targeted platforms have pledged to comply with the ban, Indonesia’s digital minister Meutya Hafid said last month, but the ban will eventually apply to “all digital platforms”, with the government considering also enforcing it on online shopping sites, he told AFP in May.

The Turkish parliament approved a law in April to prevent children under 15 accessing social media platforms.

And some European countries, including Norway, Greece, France, Spain and Denmark, have said they will introduce similar restrictions.

‘Blanket ban’ criticism

“Child users who do not complete age verification may be unable to create an account and face restrictions on account access or platform features,” the Malaysian FAQ read.

The commission said the measures were “not intended to prohibit child users from the internet or to deny them access to technology”, but to promote age-appropriate access to social media.

However, monitoring groups have urged Malaysia to withdraw the “blanket ban” on social media for under-16s.

“Children should not be prohibited from accessing the digital world, they should be able to do so safely and in ways that protect their rights,” the UK-based freedom of expression monitor Article 19 and other groups said in a joint statement Friday.

“The proposed blanket social media ban does not address the root issues of social media companies’ business models and services,” they said. – AFP



Participants compete in the Causeway Challenge Bangkok Scrabble competition in Bangkok yesterday. – AFP



Dairy farmers pour milk onto the road during a protest against the production and trade of adulterated milk in Amritsar, India yesterday. — AFP

India's viral 'Cockroach' party founder plans street protest

NEW DELHI — The creator of India's satirical "Cockroach People's Party" vowed yesterday to lead a protest in New Delhi to take the viral social media campaign to the streets.

The parody "Cockroach Janta Party" (CJP) — echoing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) — has won millions of online followers on social media sites since its launch last month.

It was set up after Chief Justice Surya Kant reportedly called young people who criticised the government "cockroaches" and "parasites" during a hearing.

Kant later said his comments were taken out of context and that he was referring to those who use fake degrees.

Abhijeet Dipke, the 30-year-old Boston University graduate behind the online movement, said on social media platform X he would return to India to lead a "peaceful protest" on Saturday.

He called for the resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, who has faced criticism over alleged irregularities in several key examinations.

"Students have committed suicide and the hard work of tens of thousands of students has been destroyed," Dipke said in a video message posted online.

Social media handles of the CJP, which calls itself "a political front for the youth, by the youth, for the youth", have been blocked repeatedly in India.

Its Instagram handle has more than 22 million followers — more than double the BJP's 9.5 million followers on the same site, as well as the main opposition Congress Party's 13.9 million followers.

Dipke called on followers to meet him at New Delhi airport before accompanying him to seek police permission for a demonstration.

"My friends and family are afraid that I will be arrested right at the airport and then sent to jail," he said.

"But I still hope that our country is still a democracy today and that we will be granted permission to protest peacefully."

Critics have repeatedly accused Modi's government of using state institutions to stifle dissent, a charge it rejects. — AFP

Afghanistan faces one of world's highest maternal mortality rates: UN

KABUL - Afghanistan continues to face one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, with an estimated 600 maternal deaths for every 100,000 live births, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), local media outlet TOLONews reported yesterday.

According to the report, access to skilled healthcare services and the presence of female health workers remain crucial to saving the lives of mothers and newborns across the country.

Despite ongoing efforts to improve healthcare services, limited access to maternal care continues to pose a significant challenge, particularly in remote and

underserved areas where shortages of trained medical personnel and healthcare facilities persist, the report said.

According to the OCHA, inadequate maternal healthcare services leave many women vulnerable to preventable complications during pregnancy and childbirth, contributing to the country's high mortality rate.

The agency underscored the need to strengthen healthcare systems and expand access to essential maternal and newborn care, stressing that improved healthcare services are key to reducing preventable deaths and enhancing public health outcomes in Afghanistan. — Xinhua

Rescuers seek new route to 2 missing in Laos cave

VIENTIANE — Rescuers searching for two men missing in a partially flooded cave in Laos for about two weeks said they were scouring for a new entry point yesterday as heavy rain slowed divers' efforts inside.

Rescue divers found five other men alive around 300 metres from the mouth of the cave in Xaysomboun province last week after they had been stranded inside by flash floods for a week.

Foreign divers extracted one of the men on Friday, and four more found their own way out on Saturday. Rescue teams had delivered food and medicine for them and had pumped water from the cave for days, giving them an easier exit.

One of the five survivors, identified as Laen, said in a video released by state media yesterday the men had gone into the cave to hunt bats for food and then figured they could extract some gold from old mining areas.

"But then rain came and the cave was flooded," Laen says in the video.

"We went to look for food and

thought that if we could make money as well, then why not? That's the way we all live in the village."

Earlier state media reports said the seven men had entered the cave to search for gold.

The two missing men are believed to have gone deeper inside, leaving rescuers scrambling to find an alternative access route after recent rainfall made conditions in the cave more risky.

'Too unstable'

Malaysian diver Lee Kian Lie told AFP yesterday that one team was still searching inside the cave and clearing a path after rain inundated the tunnels.

A second team "will search possible entry from the other side into the cave chamber" where rescuers suspect the last two men are stuck, he said in a message.

Rain made some of the passages "too unstable", so the search priority "has shifted to some promising leads above the cave" that might link to a chamber where the two men took shelter, Finnish diver Mikko Paasi said on social media.

"We as a dive team will assist the local climbers and stand by in case they find water and our expertise is needed again," added Paasi, who took part in the dramatic 2018 rescue of a youth football team from a flooded cave in Thailand.

Thai rescuer Kengkard Bongkawong said teams were also using satellite radar to look for tunnels that could lead them to the missing men.

"We are racing to pump water out and making an air line into the cave for breathing," Kengkard said in a video posted to social media.

Japanese diver Yoshitaka Isaji said teams had found another potential way into the cave through "a crack" in the mountain.

"The space may continue after a descent of approximately 100 metres using a rope," he wrote in a Facebook post. "We will continue to search the crack."

Another Thai rescuer, Manat Artmongkron, posted that a team heard responding "knocking sounds" in a chamber after rappelling to a depth of 70 metres, which he called "good news". — AFP



The world's largest French-flagged container ship and the first in a new series of 24,000-TEU LNG-powered vessels, CMA CGM Notre Dame, is seen docked at the Pasir Panjang port terminal in Singapore yesterday. — AFP

Indonesia maps wildlife virus genomes to strengthen pandemic preparedness

JAKARTA — Indonesia's National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN) is mapping the genetic profiles of viruses found in wildlife traded in North Sulawesi to strengthen early detection of diseases with pandemic potential.

The project, conducted in cooperation with the Australian Center for Disease Preparedness, is in its second year and focuses on genomic surveillance of viruses

from the Coronaviridae, Orthomyxoviridae and Paramyxoviridae families found in bats, rodents and birds.

"This project is a progressive step for BRIN to facilitate knowledge transfer and align with global research standards," Andes Hamuraby Rozak, head of BRIN's Research Organization for Life Sciences and Environment, said yesterday.

The two sides have also validated laboratory protocols and expanded the use of next-generation sequencing technology to improve virus monitoring and characterization.

The BRIN said the findings are expected to support the development of early warning systems for zoonotic diseases and strengthen regional health security. — Xinhua

Drunk driver kills 6 at Sri Lanka soup kitchen

COLOMBO — A drunk truck driver crashed into a crowd waiting for free food for a Buddhist festival near Sri Lanka's capital, killing six people and injuring seven others, police said yesterday.

The 42-year-old driver fled the scene after the crash in Meegoda, on the outskirts of Colombo, late Sunday.

He was later arrested, and tests confirmed he was drunk, police said.

The victims had been waiting to receive food distributed as part of the Buddhist festival of Vesak.

Sri Lanka records about 3,000 road fatalities each year. — AFP

Lebanon's Beaufort castle, a strategic landmark seized by Israel



This picture taken from Marjayoun, southern Lebanon, shows an Israeli flag and a Golani Brigade flag fluttering atop the medieval Beaufort Castle in Arnoun yesterday. — AFP

BEIRUT — Israeli soldiers have captured a crusader-era castle in southern Lebanon that has for centuries withstood invasions and battles, seizing once more a strategic landmark they once occupied for nearly two decades.

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.

As Israel seeks to extend its area of control in Lebanon beyond the Litani river, the castle has once again emerged as a strategic point — and a heritage site at risk of being damaged by war.

Ancient castle, strategic location

The castle was originally built by the King of Jerusalem around 1137 and is “one of the best-preserved examples of medieval castles in the Near East” according to UNESCO.

The UN body has now rung the alarm on the safety of southern Lebanon’s ancient monuments and landmarks, including Beaufort, as the conflict intensifies.

Perched on a lofty ridge that dominates southern Lebanon and northern Israel, extending into the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, the stony redoubt has been seized, lost, won again and abandoned by successive armies for nearly nine centuries.

Crusaders and Muslim forces once

battled for control of the fortress, which changed hands several times between them.

Centuries later, its elevated position and location about five kilometres from Lebanon’s southern border with Israel have turned the castle once again into a strategic position as Israel seeks to widen its ground invasion of Lebanon.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said taking Beaufort was “a dramatic shift” on Sunday as he vowed to push further into Lebanon.

This came days after 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.

“This is the first time that Israel is conquering the Beaufort since the withdrawal in 2000,” Orna Mizrahi, a senior researcher at Israel’s Institute for National Security Studies, told AFP.

Amid threats to northern Israeli communities, “There was a lot of pressure on the government, on the cabinet, to do something more,” she said.

“I think that this is one of the main motivations... to go to a deeper military action in Lebanon.”

Civil war history

During Lebanon’s 1975-1990 civil war,

Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) militants used the castle as an observation point in their fight against Israel.

Israel overran the fortress during its 1982 invasion of Lebanon, after a prolonged battle with the Palestinian fighters hidden in the castle’s maze of historic underground tunnels.

The castle was damaged by violent bombardment in the process.

Israel used it as one of its main observation posts until its troops withdrew in 2000, particularly for electronic listening, on the edge of the central sector of its so-called security zone.

Latest strikes

On Sunday, the invading army’s banner was seen by AFP above the castle.

Hezbollah says its fighters are still battling Israeli troops near the fortress, where it says it had no military presence.

Earlier last week, an AFP correspondent saw smoke rising near Beaufort castle after what appeared to be artillery fire.

Lebanon’s culture minister had told AFP that Israeli strikes on the country’s south were endangering heritage sites and that “several bombs fell” on the fortress.

The region around the Beaufort castle is “the epicentre of the battle being waged for the control of localities” close to it, in the Nabatieh region, Ghassan Salame had told AFP. — AFP

NY Times publisher slams AI companies’ ‘brazen theft’ from news outlets

MARSEILLE — *The New York Times* publisher yesterday slammed artificial intelligence (AI) companies for “brazen theft of intellectual property”, warning they threaten the future of journalism during a speech at the World News Media Congress in the French city of Marseille.

AI companies’ “hijacking of the public square is made possible by the original sin that animates their AI products — a brazen theft of intellectual property that has occurred at an unprecedented scale,” said A.G. Sulzberger, according to his published remarks.

“Tech giants strip-mine news websites without permission or compensation,” he said, adding that the news sector “has been too quiet, too passive and too fragmented in the face of abuses by the companies leading the AI revolution”.

Sulzberger, whose company is suing OpenAI, the creator of ChatGPT, and Microsoft over the use of copyrighted work, delivered an indictment against AI companies before news executives gathered for the 77th WAN-IFRA World News Media Congress, in a speech that was met with loud applause.

“Our profession has been too quiet, too passive and too fragmented in the face of abuses by the companies leading the AI revolution,” he said.

Sulzberger said AI companies are “consolidating their outsize control over our data and our attention” but are “failing to embrace a core responsibility that comes with this power — to ensure the public has access to trustworthy news and information”.

“I fear we are careening toward a future with fewer and fewer journalists to do the expensive, difficult work of original reporting,” he said.

The congress, which runs until tomorrow, is organised in partnership with CMA Media, the media arm of shipping giant CMA CGM.

It takes place amid steep concern over the media outlets’ economic model, under pressure from artificial intelligence and facing ever-intensifying competition from social networks.

— AFP



The New York Time Company chairman and publisher of The New York Times Arthur Gregg Sulzberger gives a speech on AI and journalism on the opening day of the 77th World News Media Congress in Marseille, southern France, yesterday. — AFP

British Sikh man gets life in jail for student killing

LONDON — A UK court yesterday jailed a British Sikh man for life for killing a student in a case that sparked anger after police handcuffed the dying victim following a false claim of racial abuse.

A judge at Southampton Crown Court sentenced Vickrum Digwa, a 23-year-old local resident, to life in prison with an obligation to spend at least 21 years in jail for the killing of 18-year-old student Henry Nowak.

A jury on Friday found Digwa guilty of murdering the accountancy and finance student on the street last December.

The trial was seized on by prominent figures such as far-right activist Tommy Robinson and SpaceX founder Elon Musk who claimed it showed police bias.

Officers arrested and handcuffed Nowak at the scene after Digwa claimed

he had been racially abused. The victim died from stab wounds soon after.

The judge said he was “sure that Henry had said nothing racist”.

The police force has apologised for handcuffing Nowak, and said on Friday it had referred itself to the Independent Office for Police Conduct watchdog.

The victim’s father, Mark Nowak, said outside court: “Henry should not have died on the streets of Southampton in police custody. The way he was treated was inhumane and degrading.”

After the verdict, a right-wing group, Turning Point UK, posted footage of its leader speaking at a protest on Friday outside a police station in Southampton.

A far-right group, White Vanguard, held a small “vigil” in Southampton on Sunday, according to campaign group

Stand Up to Racism, which held a counter-protest.

Digwa used a large knife he wore in a sheath attached to a belt outside his clothing to carry out the murder while also wearing a small Sikh ceremonial dagger, or kirpan, said the judge, William Mousley.

The Sikh Federation said the weapon used by Digwa “was not a kirpan”, which can be legally carried as an article of faith.

The Sikh Federation said claims that Digwa killed Nowak using the ceremonial dagger “unnecessarily brought our sacred kirpan into disrepute and increased verbal and physical abuse against Sikhs in the last couple of weeks”.

The prosecution service denied calling the murder weapon a kirpan. — AFP

AI giant Anthropic confidentially files for IPO

SAN FRANCISCO—AI giant Anthropic, the maker of the Claude chatbot, announced yesterday that it had filed confidentially for an initial public offering (IPO), as Silicon Valley AI companies look to raise the enormous sums needed to fuel the sector's rapid expansion.

A confidential filing lets a company submit its IPO paperwork to the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) for review without making its financials and business details public until much later in the process.

"This gives us the option to go public after the Securities and Exchange Commission completes its review," the company said in a statement. "The proposed initial public offering will depend on market conditions and other factors."

The filing came just days after the company said it raised US\$65 billion in a new funding round that valued the Claude maker at US\$965 billion, putting it on the cusp of a trillion-US-dollar valuation.

The latest fundraising round confirmed Anthropic's place as one of the most

significant players in AI, having built its reputation by focusing on delivering generative AI to enterprise clients.

Anthropic's near-trillion-US-dollar valuation puts it ahead of ChatGPT maker OpenAI, which was valued at US\$852 billion in March and is also aiming to go public as early as this year, with a filing expected imminently.

The IPOs would likely follow Elon Musk's SpaceX to Wall Street.

SpaceX, which absorbed his AI company, xAI, in February, could see shares begin trading as early as June 12, targeting a valuation of approximately US\$1.75 trillion in what would be the largest IPO in history.

The IPO filing comes as Anthropic navigates a high-profile legal dispute with the Pentagon, having sued the Defence Department after the latter designated the company a supply chain risk.

Anthropic called the move unconstitutional retaliation for its refusal to grant the military unfettered access to its AI models. —AFP



Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei gestures as he addresses the audience as part of a session on AI during the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos on January 23, 2025. Anthropic, the maker of the Claude chatbot, announced yesterday that it had filed confidentially for an IPO, as the AI companies in Silicon Valley look to raise the huge sums needed to power the AI frenzy. —AFP

Russia summons Lithuania envoy over 'desecration' of Soviet soldiers

MOSCOW — Russia yesterday summoned Lithuania's chargé d'affaires in Moscow to condemn the "barbaric" exhumation of the bodies of Soviet soldiers buried in the Baltic country as a "desecration".

Jolanta Tubaitė was issued "a vigorous protest regarding the new barbaric projects of the Lithuanian authorities aimed at destroying, in the town of Vievis, the cemetery of Soviet soldiers and officers who fell in battle for the liberation of Lithuania from the fascist yoke", Moscow's foreign ministry said.

"It was pointed out... that the destruction, damage, or desecration of military graves, including those located abroad, is a criminal offence in Russia," it added.

"The malicious campaign aimed at

desecrating the remains of soldiers who fell in battle in Lithuania continues to gain momentum."

Tubaitė had already been summoned on April 30 following the exhumation of Red Army graves in the city of Siauliai.

According to Lithuanian media, the exhumations are linked to a law, which came into force in 2023, on the "de-Sovietisation" of the EU and NATO member.

Relations are at rock bottom between Russia and the Baltic states, which count among Ukraine's most fervent backers.

Tensions have regularly flared with Moscow since the Baltic states gained independence from the USSR in 1991 over Soviet memorials and the fate of the large Russian minorities in the region. —AFP

Ex-US envoy Mandelson slams UK govt's lack of 'verve' in files



Former UK ambassador to the United States, Peter Mandelson, is pictured as he walks his dog near his residence in central London on April 20, 2026. British ministers braced yesterday for the release of potentially embarrassing documents relating to Prime Minister Keir Starmer's controversial appointment of Peter Mandelson as envoy to the US. —AFP

Peter Hutchison

LONDON — Disgraced ex-envoy Peter Mandelson vowed the UK government would "never regret" making him ambassador to the United States, but sharply criticised its leadership, among thousands of documents published yesterday relating to his appointment.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer has been plagued for months by his decision to hand Mandelson the plum diplomatic posting despite knowing of his connections to late US sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Yesterday, the government published a vast second tranche of files, including emails and WhatsApp messages, related to Mandelson's nine-month stint in Washington, which ended in September 2025.

In a handwritten note to then-foreign secretary David Lammy in November 2024, Mandelson wrote: "If you were minded to appoint me I would make sure you never regret it".

But in a series of WhatsApp messages in May 2025 to then-cabinet secretary Pat McFadden, Mandelson, a Labour Party veteran, lashed out at Starmer and the government.

"Keir lacks verve as does the Cabinet as a whole," Mandelson wrote on May 2, 2025.

"The problem is the government doesn't give a sense of crusading to turn round and change Britain. That's what I mean by panache, verve," he wrote the next day.

'Beleaguered, bereft'

A first cache of documents released in March revealed Starmer was warned Mandelson posed a "general reputational risk" because of his connection to Epstein, but appointed him anyway.

Starmer sacked Mandelson after revelations about the extent of his friendship with the US billionaire financier, who died in prison in New York while facing sex-trafficking charges in 2019.

The controversy contributed towards dire election results for Starmer's embattled Labour administration in Scotland, Wales and England last month, triggering calls from dozens of lawmakers for him to resign.

The prime minister has repeatedly apologised for the appointment, including to the women trafficked by Epstein, but has refused to quit despite three high-profile aides losing their jobs over the controversy.

The three volumes of documents, spanning more than 1,500 pages, showed Mandelson, a former Labour spin doctor and cabinet minister who helped engineer several election wins for ex-prime minister Tony Blair, regularly exchanged messages with senior government ministers.

In one, written a year after Starmer led Labour to a landslide general election victory in July 2024, Mandelson described the prime minister's Downing Street operation as "beleaguered and bereft".

Starmer's official spokesman described yesterday's release of documents, which included numerous redactions including on national security grounds, as an "unprecedented piece of government transparency".

But it only came after members of parliament voted in February to force the government to publish the documents.

'Reputational risk'

The government has said it is withholding some documents on the advice of police, who are investigating Mandelson over alleged misconduct in office more than a decade ago.

Mandelson is accused of leaking sensitive information to Epstein during his time as a government minister. He denies wrongdoing.

The latest files reveal that Mandelson "declined to comply" with a request from the government to hand over messages from his personal phone.

Starmer has claimed that Mandelson lied about how close he was to the disgraced financier.

His former chief of staff Morgan McSweeney resigned for advising the prime minister to make the appointment.

The controversy has also claimed the jobs of Starmer's former chief of communications and the most senior civil servant in the Foreign Office, whom the prime minister fired for not telling him or other ministers that Mandelson had not passed security checks for the role.

Starmer has been clinging on to power for weeks but has refused to "walk away", with a shadow contest to try to replace him already underway.

Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham is contesting a special election to return to parliament later this month that is widely believed to be a precursor to challenging Starmer for the party leadership. —AFP

Pro-Trump lawyer, leftist senator launch Colombia runoff campaigns

Valentín Díaz

BOGOTÁ – A hard-right Donald Trump fan and a leftist senator yesterday threw themselves into campaigning for Colombia’s presidential runoff, a day after leading a first-round vote dominated by drug-related guerrilla violence.

Right-wing lawyer Abelardo de la Espriella was the surprise winner of Sunday’s vote, garnering over 43 percent to 41 percent for the favourite, senator Iván Cepeda.

De la Espriella stormed from behind in recent weeks on a tough-on-crime platform that has resonated with voters across Latin America worried about surging violence by armed groups.

The millionaire self-described “Tiger,” who has billed himself as a political norm-smashing outsider, vowed to end talks with cocaine-trafficking rebels and instead crush them



Colombia’s presidential candidate for the Pacto Histórico party, Iván Cepeda, raises his clenched fist during a press conference in Bogotá yesterday, the day after the presidential election. – AFP



Colombia’s presidential candidate Abelardo de la Espriella, of the Salvadores de la Patria (“Saviours of the Fatherland”) movement, speaks to supporters behind bulletproof glass in Barranquilla, Colombia, on Sunday, election day. De la Espriella, a far-right candidate who represents opposition to leftist President Gustavo Petro, has the upper hand against the left ahead of the presidential run-off on June 21 in Colombia. The 47-year-old lawyer won by a narrow margin in Sunday’s first round, beating left-wing Senator Iván Cepeda, who had been the poll favourite throughout the hustings. – AFP

with military force.

Cepeda, an acolyte of polarising left-wing President Gustavo Petro, campaigned on keeping the struggling peace process alive and expanding social programmes to reduce inequality.

On Sunday night, he vowed to defeat the “fascist extreme right,” linking his rival to mafia people and plutocrats.

He and Petro also questioned the accuracy of the results, leading De la Espriella yesterday to accuse them of trying to “steal democracy from us” and draw parallels with ousted Venezuelan strongman Nicolás Maduro.

Cepeda faces an uphill battle to make up lost ground in the June 21 runoff.

Third-placed candidate Paloma Valencia, an establishment conservative who found herself outflanked by De la Espriella on the right, backed him against what she called Cepeda’s “neocommunist.”

De la Espriella “captured the spirit of anti-Petro sentiment and right-wing radicalism,” Juan Nicolás Garzón, a professor of Political Science at the University of La Sabana, explained to AFP.

Cepeda, a philosopher and human rights activist who speaks in measured tones, needs to be “a bit more confrontational,” Garzón added.

One of the questions hanging over the run-off is how centrists will vote.

Failed vice-presidential candidate Juan Daniel Oviedo, a centrist, lamented that the country was “caught between populist extremes” and he refused to endorse either finalist.

The campaign was marred by car bombs, drone attacks and the assassination of a leading presidential candidate and dozens of local political leaders.

De la Espriella addressed rallies from behind bulletproof glass.

He has vowed a “shock plan” to bombard armed groups, echoing the iron-fist rhetoric that has swept the right to power across Latin America.

“We’ll start immediately with the bombing of narco-terrorist camps,” he told AFP in an interview during the campaign.

He has also pledged to build 10 mega-prisons, modelled on El Salvador’s Terrorism Confinement Centre (CECOT), where inmates, he says, will survive on “bread and water.”

While Colombia has thrived in the decade since a landmark peace accord with FARC guerrillas, pockets of the country are still under the grip of armed groups vying for control of cocaine routes, illegal gold mining and extortion.

‘Radical extremes’

Many voters accuse Petro, who was constitutionally barred from seeking re-election, of allowing violence to flourish while pursuing peace.

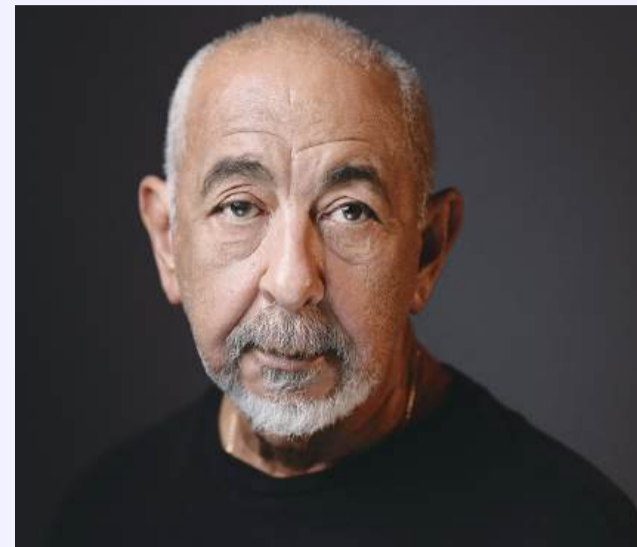
Cepeda, 63, is the son of a leftist senator killed by right-wing paramilitaries.

His supporters point to a higher minimum wage, increased education spending and land transfers to poor communities under the left.

Gloria Terranova, a 59-year-old coffee plantation worker, said she held out hope that Cepeda might still win the presidency despite finishing second in the first round.

“Right now we are at radical extremes: one side wants peace, the other wants war,” she said. – AFP

Leonardo Padura talks about life, writing in an uncertain Cuba



Cuban novelist and journalist Leonardo de la Caridad Padura Fuentes poses during a photo session in Paris last Thursday. – AFP

Toni Cerda

PARIS – In Cuba, “reality doesn’t knock, it opens the door and barges into your house”, said author Leonardo Padura in an interview with AFP, reflecting on the uncertainty gripping his country under mounting pressure from Washington.

Padura – considered the most widely read Cuban writer globally – sat down with AFP at the Cervantes Institute in Paris while promoting the French edition of his book “Going to Havana”.

Cuba, under a US embargo since 1962, faces a profound economic crisis worsened by an energy blockade imposed by Washington since January.

Gas shortages and blackouts are straining Cubans, including 70-year-old Padura, who was initially reticent to discuss the situation in his country and hometown Havana.

“In Cuba, it doesn’t matter if your economic situation allows you to have a different relationship with reality. Reality doesn’t knock, it opens the door and barges into your house,” he said.

Still, the author wouldn’t live anywhere else, with Havana being a consistent muse despite the “complicated” living conditions – though he acknowledged his “fortunate” financial situation compared to others.

“When there’s a power cut, I don’t have any connection and I can end up spending a whole day waiting to be able to get online... to do my work,” he said.

“I was telling my brother a few days ago, ‘Every time we go out in the car, it’s not that we’ve taken one more trip, it’s that we’re going to be able to take one less, because we don’t know when we’ll have gasoline again’.”

‘Palpable’ uncertainty

Writing “Going to Havana”, in which he revisits the history of the city through realistic chronicles and fiction, was a “debt”, a “necessity” that he fulfilled in 2024, he said.

In the two years since, he said Havana has seen “more deterioration, but essentially the structure of the city and people’s needs remain the same”.

“Maybe all of that has just sped up over the last two years since I wrote the book,” he added.

“Ten years ago, what was happening in Cuba? There was a Rolling Stones concert, [then-president Barack] Obama was visiting Cuba, a baseball game between the Cuban team and a Major League team,” he said.

Compared to life in Cuba today, “it’s as if we were in two different countries”, he added.

In the intervening years, Donald Trump was elected in 2017 and again in 2025, applying a “maximum pressure” policy on Cuba, as well as openly musing about seizing the communist-ruled island.

Padura fears Washington could launch a military operation, or even bombings, the “collateral damage” of which would be “terrible”.

Asked what he would envision if he had to set a story in a Havana of the future, he said: “I don’t know what Havana might look like tomorrow or the day after tomorrow.”

“The future is a huge question mark for everyone, and uncertainty is universal. But in Cuba’s case, it’s a very palpable, very painful reality that is right there in front of us.” – AFP

China’s SAIC to build first European EV plant in Spain

MADRID – Chinese automaker SAIC Motor will build its first electric vehicle factory in Europe in the northwestern Spanish region of Galicia, regional authorities said yesterday.

The plant is expected to begin construction in the port city of La Coruña in 2027 and start operation at the end of the following year, with a yearly production target of 120,000 vehicles, said the head of the regional government of Galicia, Alfonso Rueda.

The project will involve an initial investment of around 200 million euros (US\$215 million) and is expected to create 2,300 jobs, he told a news conference.

Spain is particularly attractive to Chinese investors because its economy is growing at one of the fastest rates in Europe and energy costs remain relatively low due to the country’s bet on renewable power.

Bilateral ties have strengthened in recent years, with Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez visiting China four times over in the past three years.

The closer times some as relations between Europe and the United States have strained under US President Donald Trump.

Chinese carmakers have quickly built up their presence in the lucrative European auto market, buoyed by technological advances and EU rules that call for 90 percent of all cars sold in the 27-nation bloc to be electric by 2035.

SAIC has been selling hybrid and EVs in Europe under the MG brand for several years.

In recent weeks, several Chinese car brands have said they plan to manufacture in Europe, a move that would allow them to avoid EU customs duties and reduce transport issues. – AFP

Mexican goalkeeper Ochoa set for historic 6th World Cup



MEXICO CITY – Mexican star Guillermo Ochoa is set to become the first goalkeeper to appear in six World Cup finals after being named in the co-hosts' squad.

The 40-year-old, who plays for Cypriot outfit AEL Limassol, joins superstars Cristiano Ronaldo of Portugal and Argentina's Lionel Messi in performing for the sixth time at the quadrennial football festival.

However, while Ronaldo and Messi are automatic first choices, Ochoa is unlikely to have much game time as he has dropped down the pecking order in recent years.

Ochoa, whose first World Cup was in Germany in 2006, headlines the squad along with forwards Raul Jimenez and Santiago Gimenez, who play for Premier League side Fulham and Serie A giants AC Milan respectively.

Two of the squad named on Sunday – Spain-born midfielder Alvaro Fidalgo and Colombia-born forward Julian Quinones – have become pivotal players for the Javier Aguirre-coached team since being naturalised.

Gilberto Mora, the talented 17-year-old attacking midfielder, is set to become the youngest player to represent Mexico at a World Cup.

For Aguirre, 67, it will be his third World Cup in charge, having been in the dugout at the 2002 and 2010 renewals.

On both occasions they have failed to progress beyond the group stage but this time round will hope to follow the sides of 1970 and 1986 - when they also hosted the finals - in reaching the last eight.

Mexico, who are co-hosting with Canada and the US, play in the tournament's opening game against South Africa on June 11 in Mexico City.

They go on to play South Korea on June 18 and round off the group stage against Czech Republic on June 24. – AFP



Mexico's goalkeeper Guillermo Ochoa clears the ball during a friendly against Australia at The Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California, on Saturday. – AFP

Brazil thrash Panama 6-2 in World Cup send-off

Football

RIO DE JANEIRO – Brazil turned on the style with a 6-2 drubbing of Panama on Sunday in a lopsided World Cup send-off at the Maracana Stadium in Rio de Janeiro.

Real Madrid star Vinicius Jr fired the Brazilians into the lead inside the opening minute, collecting a pass from veteran midfielder Casemiro before lashing in a thunderous strike from 25 yards.

The five-time World Cup-winners were jolted though in the 14th minute when Panama grabbed a freak equaliser, Michael Murillo's free-kick taking a wicked deflection off Matheus Cunha and sailing past Brazil keeper Alisson.

The combination of Vinicius and Casemiro restored Brazil's advantage six minutes before half-time.

Vinicius jinked into space on the left hand side of the penalty area, and what looked like a curling shot destined for the far corner was helped into the net by a glancing header from Casemiro.

Brazil coach Carlo Ancelotti rang the changes at half-time, replacing his entire starting line-up with the exception of Leo Pereira as the second half got under way.

The new-look Seleção wasted no time in asserting their superiority, rattling in three quick goals to put Brazil 5-1 up.



Casemiro (right) and Vinicius Jr. of Brazil celebrate scoring during a friendly against Panama at the Maracana Stadium in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on Sunday. – Xinhua

Teenager Rayan made it 3-1 in the 53rd minute, the 19-year-old Bournemouth talent collecting a misplaced pass from Panama goalkeeper Orlando Mosquera on the right flank and calmly curling in his shot to the delight of the Maracana crowd.

Lucas Paqueta swept in Brazil's fourth from the edge of the area in the 60th minute, and Igor Thiago made it 5-1 from the penalty spot three minutes later after being brought down by Mosquera.

Botafogo's Danilo completed Brazil's scoring in the 81st minute,

controlling Paqueta's floated pass into the box before wrongfooting the covering Panama defence and burying the finish.

Panama grabbed a late consolation when Carlos Harvey crashed in a 30-yard screamer.

Brazil face a final friendly against Egypt in Cleveland, Ohio next Saturday, before opening their World Cup Group C campaign against Morocco on June 13.

The Brazilians also face Haiti and Scotland in the first round of the tournament. – AFP

Premier League record-breaker Milner retires



LONDON – Former England midfielder James Milner has announced his retirement from football at the age of 40 after 24 seasons in the Premier League.

The Brighton player began his career at boyhood club Leeds and went on to win three Premier League titles – two with Manchester City and one with Liverpool, where he also won the Champions League.

Milner broke the record for the most Premier League appearances this season, ending his career with a total of 658 games.

“After 24 seasons in the Premier League, it feels like the right time to bring an end to my playing career,” he

said in an Instagram post yesterday.

“From making my debut for Leeds, who I supported growing up, at the age of 16 and becoming the Premier League's youngest scorer, I could never have dreamed of the journey I've been on.”

Milner, then with Leeds, became the Premier League's youngest goalscorer in 2002, aged 16 years and 356 days.

The record has since been broken by James Vaughan and Max Dowman.

Milner had spells at Newcastle and Aston Villa before joining City in 2010, where he won two Premier League titles among other silverware.

He moved to Liverpool in 2015, winning a third Premier League crown, and was part of Jurgen Klopp's Cham-

pions League-winning side in 2019.

Milner joined Brighton on a free transfer in 2023 and surpassed Gareth Barry's previous Premier League appearance record of 653 games in February.

On the international stage, he won 61 caps for England, making a total of 964 appearances for club and country.

“I've been fortunate enough to experience some unforgettable moments, from fighting for survival to winning trophies, playing in Europe, and representing my country, England, at two European Championships and two World Cups,” Milner wrote.

“But more than anything, it's the people and friendships I've made throughout the game that I'll cherish forever.” – AFP

Football shorts

South Africa's World Cup squad depart for Mexico following visa delay



JOHANNESBURG – World Cup-bound South Africa departed for Mexico yesterday, a day later than planned after visa delays that were heavily criticised at home, including by the government.

The squad were scheduled to leave on Sunday but were held back at the last minute after it was discovered that four members of the set-up did not have visas, the South African Football Association (SAFA) said.

The team flew out on a chartered flight, an airport official said. They were headed to a training camp ahead of their June 11 match against Mexico in the opening game of the tournament.

“While visa delays resulted in the team losing a valuable day in its travel and preparation schedule, SAFA is satisfied that the matter has now been substantially resolved and that the team's World Cup plans remain firmly on course,” the association said.

“SAFA apologises to the nation for these unexpected travel delays.”

The delay was criticised with deputy minister of sports Peace Mabe telling domestic broadcaster eNCA it was

“shocking and embarrassing”.

“This can also impact negatively in the minds and the spirits of the players. Heads must definitely roll,” she said.

Popularly known as Bafana Bafana, South Africa are in Group A with Mexico, the Czech Republic and South Korea.

They were held to a goalless draw by Nicaragua in a warm-up match in Soweto on Friday and are scheduled to play Jamaica in another friendly on June 5. – AFP

Kevin Keegan reveals stage 4 cancer diagnosis

LONDON – Former England and Newcastle manager Kevin Keegan has revealed he has stage four cancer.

Keegan's family said in January that he had been diagnosed with the disease after being admitted to hospital for evaluation of “ongoing abdominal symptoms”.

The 75-year-old provided an update on his health during an appearance at the Tyne Theatre and Opera House in Newcastle at the weekend.

“They said we have a top doctor with this new way of fighting what you have got, which is stage four cancer,” Keegan said, in quotes reported by the *Daily Mail*.

“He was a Liverpool supporter so I went to meet him.”

Premier League club Newcastle sent their “heartfelt support and warmest wishes” to Keegan and his family.

“Everyone at the club is behind Kevin and sends strength and best wishes to him and his family for the journey ahead,” the club posted on X.

Keegan was signed for Liverpool by Bill Shankly in 1971, winning the English league title three times and the 1977 European Cup during his time at Anfield.

The forward signed for Hamburg in 1977 and was twice named European footballer of the year during his spell at the German club.

Keegan returned to England to play for Southampton and Newcastle. He won a total of 63 England caps, scoring 21 goals, and also captained the national team.

Keegan twice took charge of Newcastle during his coaching career, also managing Fulham, Manchester City and England.

Speaking at the weekend event, Keegan said he would like to return to St James' Park to say goodbye.

“I want to say goodbye,” he said. “I didn't get the chance when I left the club last time.” – AFP

Cobolli into French Open quarters

Jed Court

PARIS – Flavio Cobolli and Anna Kalinskaya booked their places in the quarter-finals of the French Open yesterday.

Austrian 28th seed Anastasia Potapova could not back up her win over defending champion Gauff, twice failing to serve for the match in a 6-4, 2-6, 7-6 (10/7) defeat by Kalinskaya.

The Russian will next face Polish qualifier Maja Chwalinska after she continued her remarkable run by cruising past the last remaining French player, Diane Parry, 6-3, 6-2.

"She's one of the top players in the world. No one knows me, to be honest, so definitely a very challenging one, like every match here," said Chwalinska of facing Kalinskaya.

There was something for the Paris crowd to cheer after Parry's defeat, though, as Paris Saint-Germain players Ousmane Dembele, Desire Doue, Warren Zaire-Emery and Bradley Barcola paraded their two Champions League trophies on court after



Diana Shnaider plays a forehand return to US Madison Keys during their singles match at the French Open tennis tournament on Court Suzanne-Lenglen at the Roland-Garros Complex in Paris yesterday. – AFP

securing a second straight title on Saturday.

Cobolli edges through

Italian 10th seed Cobolli overcame some late nerves to beat Zachary Svajda 6-2, 6-3, 6-7 (3/7), 7-6 (7/5) on Court Philippe Chatrier.

Cobolli wobbled badly from 4-0 and 5-1 up in the fourth set,

before finally getting over the line in a tie-break to reach his second Grand Slam quarter-final after Wimbledon last year.

"The match is never done and today I almost shit in my pants," said Cobolli. "I'm happy but I'm still nervous."

Cobolli will play Canadian Felix Auger-Aliassime tomorrow. – AFP

Cricket tons

Sooryavanshi sweeps IPL awards - but is too young to drive prize

AHMEDABAD – Vaibhav Sooryavanshi swept the end-of-season IPL awards and in doing so won an SUV – but the 15-year-old cricket prodigy will have to wait three years to drive it.

The Indian batting sensation plundered 776 runs at an average of 48.50 and a punishing strike-rate of 237.30 in 16 matches.

On Sunday he was named most valuable player, despite his team Rajasthan Royals narrowly failing to reach the final, and he also scooped the Orange Cap for leading the batting charts.

He was also named emerging player of the season, among other prizes.

The boy wonder was gifted a car, a TATA Sierra SUV, which at top price comes in at 2.1 million rupees (US\$22,000).

His total prize money was over US\$57,000.

However, he won't be able to get behind the wheel in the near future because the minimum driving age in India is 18.

"It feels good, but I'm feeling a little pressure because I'm here for an interview," Sooryavanshi said on winning the awards.

"But yes, it's a proud moment, it feels great, and I'll try to do even better next season."

Virat Kohli led Royal Challengers Bengaluru to their second straight title after they beat Gujarat Titans in the final in Ahmedabad.

Player of the match Kohli was seen speaking to Sooryavanshi during the presentation ceremony

well past midnight.

Sooryavanshi struck 97 and 96 in his final two innings of this edition of the IPL, adding to the growing clamour for him to earn a maiden call-up to the senior national team.

According to Indian media, Sooryavanshi has been included in a 30-member of probables for the Asian Games in September-October in Japan. – AFP

ICC to trial pink balls to counter bad light stoppages

AHMEDABAD – Cricket's governing body said yesterday it would trial the use of pink-coloured balls in Test matches to maximise play during bad light.

The red balls usually used in Tests are not easily visible in fading light, while white balls used in limited-overs matches have been found to be not durable enough for the longer format.

Pink balls are already used in day-night Tests played under lights.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) said in a statement its executive board had approved the "trialling the use of a pink ball in Test matches, with prior agreement from both teams, to maximise play in case of anticipated bad light".

The global cricketing body said it had also given approval for new "research on lighting technology for match officials and venues to reduce lost play due to poor light".

"Our discussions... have reinforced the ICC's commitment to governance, administration and the growth of cricket globally," said council chief Jay Shah, following a meeting in India's Ahmedabad. – AFP

Serena Williams to return to tennis at Queen's Club

Tennis

John Weaver

LONDON – Serena Williams confirmed her return to tennis after an absence of nearly four years yesterday, with the American great set to play women's doubles at Queen's club later this month.

The 44-year-old has not played competitively since a third-round loss at the 2022 US Open left her one short of the all-time record of 24 Grand Slam singles titles, jointly held by Margaret Court and Novak Djokovic.

Williams shared a video on social media of herself on a tennis court containing the caption: "Guess everybody heard the news", with her phone buzzing rapidly in the background.

A post from the seven-time Wimbledon champion said: "Good news travels fast."

"Queen's Club feels like the perfect place to begin this next chapter," Williams said in a statement from tournament organisers.

"Grass has given me some of the most meaningful moments of my career, and I'm excited to

be back competing on one of the sport's most iconic stages."

The women's event at the London tournament starts on June 8.

Rumours

Williams' imminent return has been touted since it was revealed in December she had re-entered the anti-doping programme - a prerequisite to play on the tour again.

The American denied she was planning a competitive return but rumours have swirled over the past few months that she was on her way back.

She has now been given a wild card for the women's doubles at Queen's, reportedly alongside young Canadian Victoria Mboko.

Djokovic predicted a return for Williams in March and a number of players have spoken about the subject at the ongoing French Open.

"I think it's good for me. I'll be very entertained," said Naomi Osaka, who famously beat Williams in the 2018 US Open final, when asked if she would watch a comeback match from Serena.

Coco Gauff, who lost in the

third round of the French Open on Saturday, said she would love to face Williams for the first time.

"Serena Williams is one of the greatest athletes the world has ever seen, and we're delighted that she will be making her return to tennis at the LTA's HSBC Championships," said WTA tournament director Laura Robson.

"Women's tennis made a historic return to the Queen's Club last year and now we have an icon of the game stepping back on to court."

The former world number one said in 2022 she did not want to use the word "retiring" but instead explained she was "evolving" away from tennis.

The American spent 319 weeks at the top of the world rankings and won 73 singles titles on the WTA Tour.

She also won 14 major Grand Slam doubles titles with older sister Venus Williams, who ended a 16-month hiatus from professional tennis last year.

Venus said the "only thing" that would have made her being back on court better would have been if Serena had also returned. – AFP



Team Visma Lease a Bike Danish rider Jonas Vingegaard (centre) wearing the overall leader's pink jersey and winner of the Giro d'Italia 2026 - Tour of Italy cycling race poses on podium with second placed Decathlon CMA CGM Team Austrian rider Felix Gall (left) and third placed Red Bull - BORA - hansgrohe Australian rider Jai Hindley, after the 21st and last stage in Rome, Italy, on Sunday. – AFP

Work begins on 2032 Brisbane Olympics stadium after protests

Olympics

BRISBANE – Work on Brisbane's new centrepiece 2032 Olympics stadium began yesterday after days of protests against the project by Indigenous and environmental groups.

Queensland state premier David Crisafulli turned the first sod at Victoria Park - close to the centre of town - in what he called a milestone moment in the countdown to the sporting extravaganza.

"It's game on - we have a plan to deliver for the 2032 Games and beyond, and today we get cracking on delivering it," he said as fencing went up at the site.

"The eyes of the world will be on us in 2032, but this is about delivering legacy benefits for all of Queensland well beyond that.

"Victoria Park will be the beating heart of Brisbane, and a place all Queenslanders can be proud of."

The 63,000-capacity Brisbane

Stadium will host the opening and closing ceremonies and athletics during the Olympics, before becoming the city's main venue for cricket and Australian Rules games.

It is part of an Aus\$7.1 billion (US\$5.09 billion) Games Venues Infrastructure Programme jointly funded by the Australian and Queensland governments.

The Aus\$3.6 billion stadium is controversial with concerns about a loss of culturally and ecologically significant green

space at a heritage-listed park.

Hundreds of people have protested in recent days with a handful of arrests.

The Save Victoria Park group say they are not anti-Olympics.

"It's about standing up for a place that holds deep meaning for community, for climate, for culture, for First Nations people and for future generations," the group say on their website.

"It's one of our last inner-city green pockets that breathes

life into our dense and rapidly developing city.

"And once it's gone, we can't get it back."

More than two-thirds of Victoria Park will remain green public space once work is complete, the Queensland government says.

The Olympics are scheduled to take place from July 23 to August 8 in 2032, followed by the Paralympics on August 24-September 5.

The 2028 Summer Olympics are in Los Angeles. – AFP

Macau noir: Johnnie To lenses Macau SAR

Stefan Hammond*

The cinematic CV of Hong Kong-born director Johnnie To Kei-fung (杜琪峯) spans decades. While To's filmography hops and skips between genres, his best work remains neo-noir thrillers where cops and crooks commingle to spawn a fertile mulch of criminal cinematic hijinks. His preferred locale: the city of Macau.

Like Macau itself, To, 71, has roots in both Asia and now Europe—audiences on the continent (particularly France and Italy) appreciate his work like few other Hong Kong filmmakers.

In the 90s, To (pronounced "toe") and frequent collaborator Wai Ka-fai founded Milkyway Image (HK) Ltd (銀河映像 (香港) 有限公司), a production house specialising in cost-efficient independent films made by To and Wai.

Keeping it old-school

Unlike *gwailo*-friendly film fare like *Ballad of a Small Player* (2025), To's visions of Macau don't include swooping drone shots of Cotai glitz. He prefers to set his principals against backdrops of old-school colonial architecture and cobblestones.

The visual charms of traditional shades (ochre against bull's blood, marine green) suit To's tales of camaraderie and betrayal. His characters – often played by some of Hong Kong's more skilled character actors – circle each other like grizzled veterans of Sergio Leone productions.

Exiled to Macau

A good place to start is *Exiled* (放·逐, 2006), produced and directed by To. Two teams of gunsels converge on a cobblestoned street, looking for a man they've been ordered to kill. But it's dinnertime, so the toughies end up helping Wo (Nick Cheung (張家輝)) cook and eat a meal. His fate is predestined, but none of his would-be assassins are keen on the snuff.

A series of stylish shootouts detonates on Macau streets, including a sequence near the now-shuttered MacTim Café. To's vision includes a simulacrum of a classic Macau hotel – room-corridors arranged around a central courtyard. It's a set – the "hotel" had no roof, to accommodate overhead shots. Fortunately shooting wasn't scheduled for the rainy season.

The persistence of vengeance

In 2009, Johnnie To was appointed an Officer of the French Order of Arts and Letters by the country's Minister of Culture. That same year saw the release of *Vengeance* (復仇), directed by To and starring Johnny Hallyday – France's answer to Elvis Presley.

Hallyday plays Francis Costello, a Parisian restaurateur whose Coloane bistro is violently invaded by bad guys. Bullet lodged in his skull, Costello experiences memory loss and, like Guy Pearce's character in *Memento*, he scribbles vital information on Polaroid photos. The Frenchman is aided by a hired trio of gunslingers, played by Anthony Wong (黃秋生), Lam Suet (林雪) and Gordon Lam (林家棟).

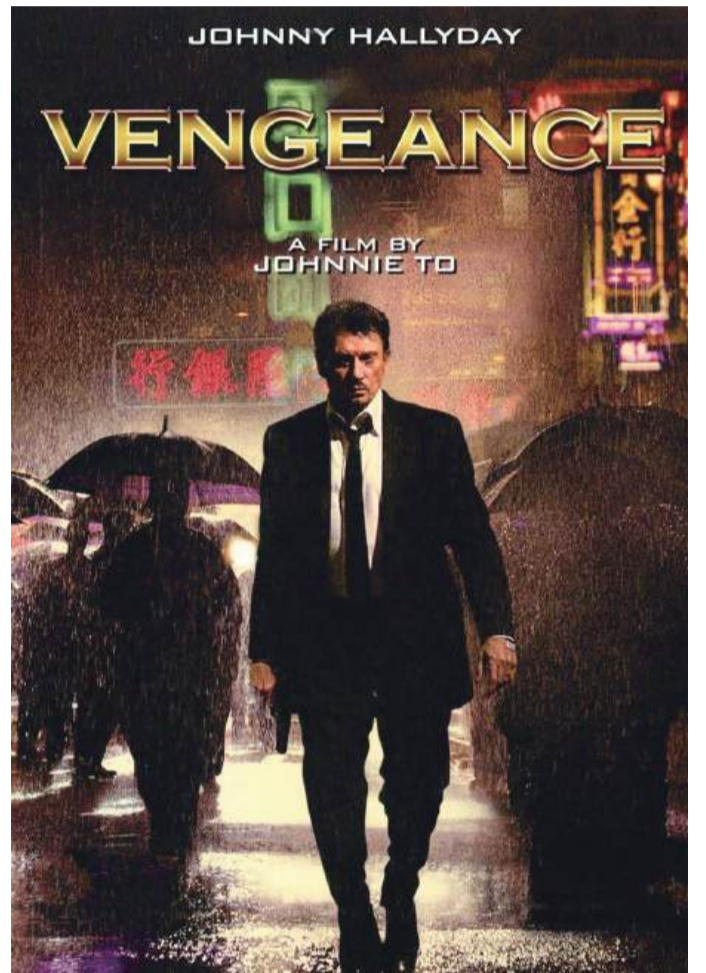
Stylized handgun-battles on narrow Macau streets, shifting loyalties, set-piece attacks punctuated by echoed guitar and percussion ensue. *Vengeance* dished up boffo box office in the Eurozone and was nominated for a Palme d'Or at Cannes.

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*A Hong Kong-based US author and film critic.



Theatrical release poster for Johnnie To's 2006 movie "Exiled" – Image courtesy of IMDb



Theatrical release poster for Johnnie To's 2009 movie "Vengeance" – Image courtesy of IMDb



Johnnie To Kei-fung looks on during the Opening Ceremony of the Tokyo International Film Festival 2024 in his capacity as one of the members of its International Competition Jury, in Tokyo on October 28, 2024. – Photo courtesy of Dick Thomas Johnson/Wikimedia Commons

'Backrooms' break N American box office records

LOS ANGELES – A24's "Backrooms," the big screen adaptation of a viral YouTube horror series, smashed several box office records with a US\$81.5 million North American debut, US media reported on Sunday

Directed by 20-year-old Kane Parsons, who created the "Backrooms" web series as a teenager, the movie's massive opening weekend haul is the largest ever for an original horror film and more than doubles A24's previous best domestic opening, according to *Variety*.

Parsons also becomes the youngest director ever to debut at number one with a feature film, the entertainment trade publication said.

Starring Oscar nominee Chiwetel Ejiofor and Renate Reinsve, the movie follows a furniture shop owner (Ejiofor) who discovers a mysterious, labyrinthine complex underneath his store.

When the man goes missing, his therapist (Reinsve) steps inside the liminal space to try and find him.

The online series, which began in 2022, became part of a phenomenon known as "creepypasta" – a short horror story reposted and modified around the web, to which other users added details such as monsters and undiscovered dimensions.

Second place went to another horror film, Focus Features' "Obsession," whose strong critic and audience reviews have seen it steadily notch higher earnings in its three weeks out.

Directed by 26-year-old Curry Baker, the film took in another US\$26.4 million at the domestic box office, Exhibitor Relations reported, and now has a global

estimated haul of nearly US\$150 million on a budget of less than US\$1 million.

Inde Navarrette has earned particular plaudits for her role as a young woman who becomes dangerously infatuated with a man, played by Michael Johnston, after he makes a magical wish for her affection.

"Star Wars: The Mandalorian and Grogu," Disney's latest entry in the blockbuster sci-fi franchise, plummeted nearly 70 percent in its second weekend in cinemas, taking in US\$25 million and finishing in third place.

The film is a jump to the big screen for the hit streaming series, and the first Star Wars film to be released in cinemas since 2019's "The Rise of Skywalker."

Maintaining its place in the top five for a sixth weekend was Lionsgate's "Michael," the biopic about king of pop Michael Jackson, which added US\$11.7 million.

The film, directed by Antoine Fuqua and starring the late popstar's nephew Jaafar Jackson, has now taken in US\$340 million at the domestic box office and over \$845 million globally, according to Exhibitor Relations.

Fifth place went to Sony's comedy "The Breadwinner," which took in US\$7.5 million in its debut weekend.

Comedian Nate Bergatze – one of the highest-grossing American stand-ups with a deadpan act focusing on family life – stars in the movie as a dad who must take care of the kids while his wife is away on business. – AFP

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 22°C~36°C	Manila 25°C~30°C	New York 15°C~25°C	Lisbon 14°C~24°C
Shanghai 22°C~33°C	Bangkok 26°C~36°C	London 12°C~19°C	Rio de Janeiro 17°C~23°C
Hong Kong 25°C~31°C	Tokyo 18°C~27°C	Frankfurt 12°C~25°C	Luanda 21°C~26°C
Taipei 24°C~35°C	Singapore 25°C~33°C	Vancouver 15°C~25°C	Maputo 14°C~28°C
Guangzhou 24°C~34°C	Kuala Lumpur 25°C~35°C	Paris 11°C~19°C	Dili 21°C~31°C
Nanjing 21°C~34°C	Jakarta 24°C~33°C	Moscow 11°C~19°C	São Tomé 25°C~33°C
Guilin 23°C~33°C	Seoul 19°C~32°C	Las Vegas 23°C~38°C	Praia 21°C~30°C
Xi'an 21°C~33°C	Sydney 13°C~18°C	Monte Carlo 17°C~25°C	Bissau 24°C~36°C

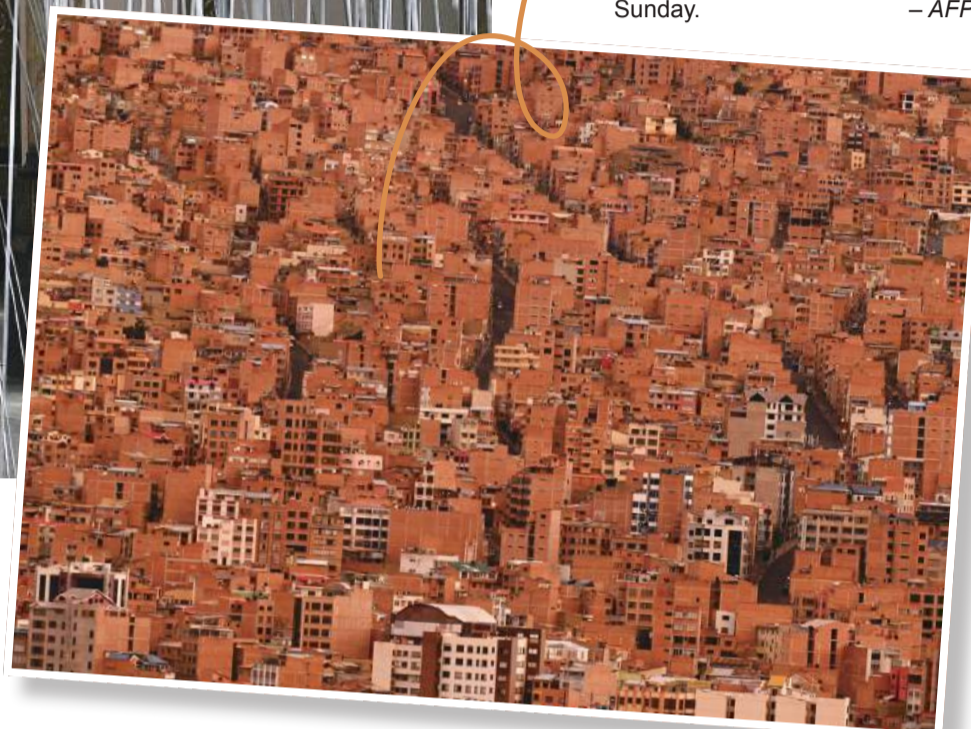


Legibility or illusion?

Spanish artist Jaume Plensa poses during the media day of his exhibition "Mirage" at the Carre Sainte-Anne in Montpellier, southern France, yesterday. - AFP

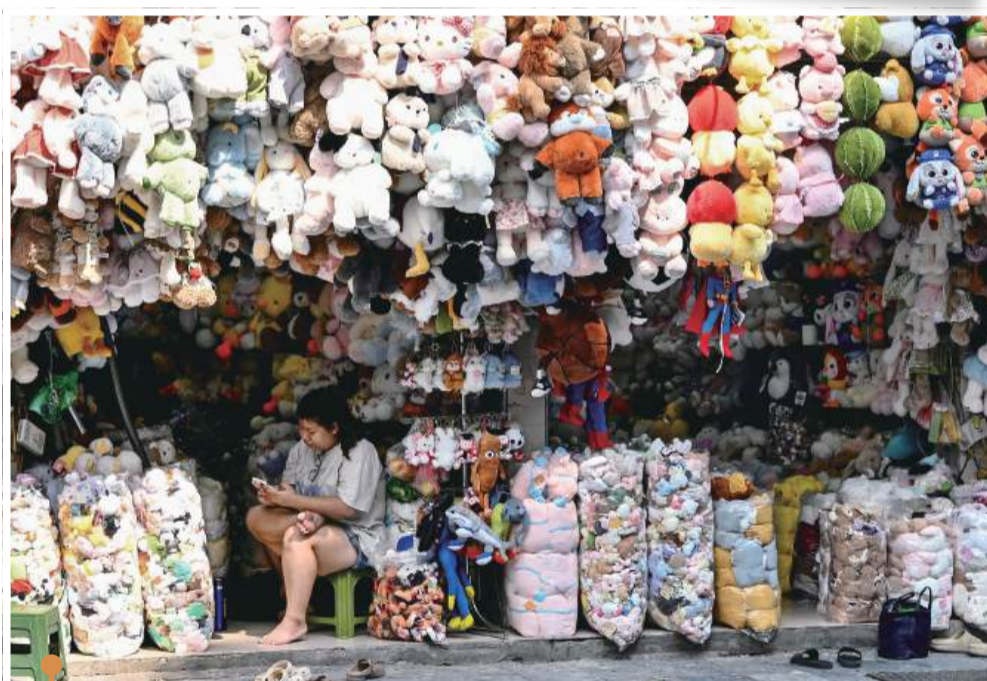
Densely packed

A view of the city of La Paz during sunset, taken from the Killi Killi viewpoint in La Paz, Bolivia on Sunday. - AFP



Best recycling

Members of the LGBTQ community take part in a pride parade in Bangkok on Sunday. - AFP



Cuddles galore

A vendor uses a mobile phone while waiting for customers at a toy shop in Hanoi yesterday. - AFP



Just a few days old

A male baby giraffe named Kenyi born on Friday looks on while sitting with his parents in the giraffe stable at the Wildlands Zoo, in Emmen, the Netherlands yesterday. The Northern giraffe's name literally means 'son after 3 daughters'.

- AFP

Balancing act

The full moon, known as the Blue Moon, rises over the Temple of Poseidon at Cape Sounion, Greece, on Sunday.

- Xinhua

