

Govt launches tender for up to 700 new taxis, only firms can bid

Tony Wong

The government yesterday launched a public tender for the granting of 14 new eight-year company licences each of which will be allowed to operate up to 50 common taxis, with the aim of meeting the city's rising demand for taxi services.

The granting of the 14 new company licences will enable up to 700 new taxis to serve the city.

Common taxis – as opposed to special radio taxis – are colloquially known as “black taxis” (“hak dik” in Cantonese), as the colour of the common taxis is black.

Currently, the city's common taxis are either operated by licenced individuals or companies.

The Transport Bureau (DSAT) announced the public tender in the Official Gazette (BO) yesterday, when it also issued a statement on the matter.

According to the current law regulating the city's taxi sector, which took effect in June 2019, only companies are allowed to bid for a licence to operate common taxis. Before the current taxi law came into force, common taxi-vehicle licences were granted to individuals.

According to the current taxi law, a single company is only allowed to hold up to 300 taxi-vehicle licences. A company must have a minimum capital of five million patacas to bid for a licence to operate common taxis. Only locally-registered companies are allowed to bid for the licences.

The public tender launched yesterday is



Taxis stop at the traffic light-controlled crossing outside Hotel Lisboa yesterday. – Photo: Tony Wong

the second tender since the current taxi law took effect in 2019.

Following a public tender process in 2023, the government granted 10 company licences in 2024 to operate common taxis, valid for eight years, with each company to operate 50 vehicles. The 500 common taxis gradually came into service after late 2024. Many of the 500 common taxis were to replace the numerous taxi-vehicle licences having expired one after another over the past few years. This

tender was the first one launched since the current taxi law took effect in 2019.

With the aim of increasing the number of common taxis in the city in a shorter time, the government decided in September last year to grant two more company licences to operate common taxis without launching a public tender, enabling 100 new taxis to hit the roads.

According to yesterday's gazette and statement, the public tender launched yesterday will grant new licences valid for eight years to

14 companies for operating common taxis. Each winner can apply to operate up to 50 taxis.

Consequently, the statement noted, the public tender will grant up to 700 new common taxi-vehicle licences.

According to yesterday's announcement, potential bidders are required to submit their tenders by July 8. DSAT officials will unseal the submitted bids at the DSAT headquarters on Estrada de D. Maria II the next day.

Continued on p.6



Contestants are in action during an offline contest of the Xizang division of the 28th China Robot and Artificial Intelligence Competition (CRAIC) at Xizang University in Lhasa, Xizang Autonomous Region, yesterday. A total of 81 teams took part in the Xizang division of the 28th CRAIC, including 19 teams from four universities enrolled for the offline contests. – Xinhua

Ebola had 'big head-start' but response catching up: WHO chief

GENEVA – The Ebola outbreak raging in central Africa had a “big head-start”, the World Health Organisation (WHO) chief acknowledged yesterday, but insisted efforts to rein in the deadly virus were making progress.

The outbreak, which was declared on May 15 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), has so far been confirmed to have infected 359 people, including 61 who have died.

But the actual numbers could be far higher, with the virus believed to have been spreading under the radar for some time before it was detected.

“The outbreak had a big head-start and we're still behind,” WHO chief Tedros

Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters at the UN health agency's headquarters in Geneva, but insisted that “we're catching up”.

Tedros, who had just returned from a trip to the DRC, where he travelled to the outbreak's epicentre in Ituri province, said he had been “very encouraged by the level of commitment I saw everywhere I went”.

But challenges remain, he said, warning that “the virus is ahead of us... we need to move faster”.

It has been clear from the start that the difficulties would be daunting, with the outbreak concentrated in Ituri, where decades of armed conflicts have forced millions of people from their homes and into crowded camps. – AFP

China expresses deep concern over further escalation of situation in Middle East: FM spokesperson

BEIJING –China is deeply concerned over the renewed escalation of situation in the Middle East, a foreign ministry spokesperson said yesterday.

– Story on p. 7

Hundreds flee as S Africa anti-migrant mobs go door-to-door

Hundreds of foreigners fearing for their lives have taken shelter in community halls on South Africa's south coast, saying mobs of locals were going door-to-door telling them to leave the country.

– Story on p. 11

Portugal hit by general strike over labour reforms

Public transport and municipal services were severely disrupted in Portugal yesterday due to a 24-hour general strike over proposed labour reforms.

– Story on p. 12

Gongbei Customs seizes 1.3 kg of corals

Armindo Neves

Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs announced in a statement yesterday that its officers seized 1.31 kg of Scleractinia (stony coral) at Gongbei Port (checkpoint) on May 13.

Gongbei Customs identified the smuggler as a Macau resident surnamed Chan.

According to the statement, on that day, Chan, carrying a long, thin plastic bag, entered the Chinese mainland through the "green channel" in the passenger inspection hall of the checkpoint. As customs officers noticed that Chan appeared to be nervous and behaved in an unusual manner, while his plastic carrier bag seemed distinctly heavy, they stopped him for inspection.

Upon further examination, the statement said, customs officers found a batch of suspected corals, weighing a total of 1.31 kg, concealed inside the plastic bag and wrapped in multiple layers of toilet paper.

According to the statement, the contraband was identified by the Technical Centre of Gongbei

Customs as skeletal pieces of a species belonging to the order Scleractinia (aka stony corals). All species of the order Scleractinia are listed in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and are classified as national Grade II key protected wild animals, the statement said.

Gongbei Customs reminded the public in a statement that carrying endangered species or their products across the border is prohibited without an official import-export certificate. Serious offences constituting a crime will result in criminal prosecution in accordance with the law.

Customs seizes 15 turtles at HZMB

Meanwhile, the Chinese mainland's General Administration of Customs (GACC) announced in a statement yesterday that Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs seized 15 live turtles at Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge's (HZMB) Zhuhai

Port (checkpoint) on April 15.

According to the statement, on that day, while conducting inspection duties at the checkpoint's inbound passenger inspection hall, customs officers noticed a traveller who had chosen the "green channel" displaying an unusual demeanour and with noticeably bulging, misshapen trouser pockets. The traveller was therefore stopped for inspection. Upon further examination, officers discovered 15 live turtles, with a total weight of 4.15 kg, tied up in socks and concealed inside both trouser pockets, the statement said, adding that the traveller was unable to provide any valid legal documentation for the animals.

On May 27, the batch of live turtles was identified by the Guangdong Haizheng Forensic Judicial Appraisal Centre as comprising six species, namely the razor-backed musk turtle, eastern box turtle, ornate box turtle, diamondback terrapin, striped mud turtle, and helmeted mud turtle. Among these, the statement said, the razor-backed musk turtle, the striped mud turtle, and the helmeted mud turtle are all listed in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). ■



This undated handout photo provided by Gongbei Customs yesterday shows 1.31 kg of stony corals seized by its officers at Gongbei Port (checkpoint) on May 13.



This undated handout photo provided by General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China (GACC) yesterday shows 15 turtles seized by Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs at HZMB Zhuhai Port (checkpoint) on April 15.

Local man loses 180,000 patacas in online dating scam

Armindo Neves

A middle-aged local man fell victim to an online dating scam in which he lost 180,000 patacas, Judiciary Police spokesman Cheong Un Hong said during a regular press conference yesterday.

According to Cheong, on May 23, the victim met a woman through the online dating app Momo*. The woman's profile displayed a QR code, which the victim scanned out of interest and added her as a friend, Cheong said.

During their conversation, the woman said that a meeting could be arranged, but an upfront payment was required, Cheong said, adding that she first asked the victim to transfer 28 yuan (33 patacas) as a "verification fee" for transport, and then 210 yuan as a "verification fee" for the hotel.

Cheong did not say whether the conversation between the two contained any sexual innuendo.

After transferring these amounts, Cheong said, the victim successfully received refunds each time, and therefore believed the situation to be genuine.

After that, the woman claimed that a "matching fee" of 1,190 yuan was required, according to Cheong.

Following the victim's transfer, the woman said that an operational error had caused the account to be frozen and requested another



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

- Photo: Armindo Neves

transfer to unlock it, Cheong said, adding that later that day, the victim made multiple transfers as instructed, but never received any of the money back. Suspecting fraud, the victim finally reported the case to the Judiciary Police on Tuesday.

According to Cheong, the victim told PJ officers that the total loss was 150,000 yuan, equivalent to about 180,000 patacas. ■

*Momo (陌陌) is a social networking application developed by Beijing Momo Technology Co., Ltd. - part of Hello Group Inc. Launched in August 2011, it is designed primarily for meeting and interacting with strangers in one's vicinity. It has the reputation of being a "hook-up app". - DeepSeek

Food Safety Publicity Week features forums, seminars & community event

Ida Cheong

Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) officials underlined yesterday that the month-long 15th Food Safety Publicity Week is being held this month in alignment with Sunday's World Food Safety Day, featuring forums, seminars, community events, and thematic courses.

The officials made the remarks during a closed-door meeting with members of the government-appointed Central District Community Service Consultative Council at the Patane Municipal Market Complex (沙梨頭街市市政綜合大樓).

Briefing reporters after yesterday's meeting, Chang Ka Wa, a deputy convenor of the government-appointed council, noted that the "Technological Supervision of Food Safety Progress" forum will take place tomorrow at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, gathering representatives from the China National Centre for Food Safety Risk Assessment (CFSA), Guangdong Administration for Market Regulation and Centre for Food Safety of Hong Kong to discuss topics such as technology-driven food safety, regional food monitoring processes, and sector development opportunities, with the aim of refining follow-up regulatory measures.

Meanwhile, a "Safe and Healthy Food" thematic talk will be held this Saturday at the Municipal Market

Complex of Patane for members of the general public. Citizens can attend the talk free of charge by registering via the "Macao One Account" platform, aiming to educate the public on food safety basics, common summer dietary misconceptions, and nutritional knowledge, Chang said.

Fellow council member Chan Hio Teng added that the "Food Safety and Cool Summer" campaign will be held at Nova Mall in Taipa from June 12 to 18, featuring booth games, guided food safety exhibition tours, parent-child colouring activities, and puzzles, with the aim of reminding the public to take proper food safety precautions during summer.

Meanwhile, the bureau has launched multilingual food safety awareness materials (available on the official website), Chan said.

Chan added that the bureau, in collaboration with food delivery platforms, conducts quarterly specialised training for delivery riders. The training is focused on standardising the use of meal containers and strictly controlling delivery duration and temperature maintenance.

Furthermore, the bureau will soon launch an electronic food safety inspection system. This digital upgrade will replace on-site paper forms, centralise inspection data within an internal platform, and enable seamless data sharing across various bureaus, Chan said. ■



Central District Community Service Consultative Council Deputy Convenor Chang Ka Wa (left) and fellow council member Chan Hio Teng look on during yesterday's press briefing after the government-appointed council's closed-door meeting at the Patane Municipal Market Complex (沙梨頭街市市政綜合大樓).

- Photo: Ida Cheong

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Macau Weather

VERY HOT.
FINE APART FROM CLOUDY PERIODS.
A FEW SHOWERS LATER.
FORCE 2 TO 4 SOUTHWESTERLY WINDS.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 60% AND 90%.



28°C~34°C

Source: SMG

'June, Month of Portugal' features variety of events

JUNHO, MÊS DE 六月 - 葡萄牙月, 於澳門
PORTUGAL
 NA RAEM
 COMEMORAÇÕES DO 10 DE JUNHO
 DIA DE PORTUGAL, DE CAMÕES E
 DAS COMUNIDADES PORTUGUESAS
 六月十 "葡國日、賈梅士日暨葡僑日"



This screenshot taken last night shows the first page of the e-version of the programme for "June, Month of Portugal".

Rui Pastorin

A raft of events is scheduled this month for "June, Month of Portugal", with a total of 38 events in its programme, according to the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) website.

Portugal annually celebrates its national day on June 10, with the MGTO website noting that it is officially known as "Day of Portugal, Camões, and the Portuguese Communities".

Portuguese poet Luís de Camões passed away on June 10, 1579 or 1580. His date of birth is unknown.

The extensive programme features art exhibitions, workshops, gastronomy, and various celebrations, to name a few.

Several events in the programme took place in late May, while others are ongoing. These include FADO* À JANELA ("Fado at the Window"), which runs until June 10 (next Wednesday) at Casa de Portugal em Macau (CPM - "Portugal's House in Macau"), and an event highlight titled Gastronomic Route - "Comer e Beber à Portuguesa", or "Eating and Drinking in the Portuguese Style", marking its fourth edition, which ends on June 30, with 35 participating restaurants offering discounts and themed menus.

Another highlight is Arraial de Santo António ("Saint Anthony's Festival") on June 13 and 14 at the Macau Portuguese School (EPM), with the event to feature concerts, food and activities, according to the event programme.

Meanwhile, an event that kicked off yesterday was a solo exhibition by local artist and curator Leong Kit Man titled "Ilha dos Amores" ("The Isle of Loves") at Albergue SCM, showcasing a collection of Chinese paintings centred around Luís de Camões' speculated sojourn in Macau and imagery from his epic poem Os Lusíadas ("The Lusíads" ["the Portuguese people"]). The exhibition is on until July 6th.

The full programme and upcoming events can be found on ipor.mo/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/programa-2026.pdf. ■

*Fado, meaning "fate" or "destiny", is a traditional style of Portuguese music that is deeply emotional, soulful, and dramatic. - Gemini

Macau launches energy-saving initiatives for WED



This poster provided by the Environmental Protection Bureau (DSPA) yesterday promotes its energy-saving initiatives for the National Event on Environment Day 2026.

Khalel Vallo

The local government is calling on residents, businesses and public institutions to take part in two energy-saving initiatives this month as part of activities marking tomorrow's World Environment Day* (WED), including a citywide lights-off campaign and a summer energy conservation programme, according to a statement issued by the Environmental Protection Bureau (DSPA) yesterday.

The activities are part of the Macau programme for the "National Event on the Environment Day 2026" and "Beautiful China Promotion Week", the statement said.

The "Switch Off for One Hour" initiative will take place tomorrow from 8:30 p.m. through 9:30 p.m., the statement noted, adding that during the event, four cross-sea bridges, six integrated resorts, selected government buildings and landmark structures, as well as participating businesses, associations, banks, hotels and schools, will turn off non-essential lighting and electrical equipment.

According to the statement, residents are also encouraged to switch off unnecessary lights and appliances at home during the hour-long initiative to help reduce carbon emissions and promote environmental protection.

Meanwhile, the "Casual Summer, Save Energy Together" initiative, which started on Monday and ends on August 31, the statement noted, adding that public servants are encouraged to wear light and comfortable clothing instead of formal suits and to set air-conditioning temperatures at no lower than 25 degrees Celsius, or increase their usual temperature settings by one degree.

The government is also encouraging private companies, associations and residents to adopt similar measures to reduce energy consumption while maintaining comfortable working and living environments, the bureau underlined, noting that the initiatives demonstrate how small lifestyle changes can collectively contribute to greener living and support the nation's "dual carbon" goals of carbon peaking and carbon neutrality.

As part of the wider programme, the Macau launch ceremony for the 2026 National World Environment Day event and the "Energy Saving and Carbon Reduction for All" initiative will be held on Saturday afternoon, the statement said.

According to the statement, the ceremony will include the launch of several environmental programmes, including the "Macau Power Saving - 5% Energy Saving Action", and recognise individuals who have contributed to environmental protection efforts. Moreover, a beach cleanup activity titled "Easy Beach Cleanup" will also be held on Saturday morning, bringing volunteers together to remove litter from local beaches, the statement noted.

More information is available through the bureau's official website at <https://www.dspa.gov.mo/index.aspx>. ■

*The annual Environment Day (also known as World Environment Day, WED) is a global event celebrated on June 5 to raise awareness and encourage action for environmental protection. Established by the United Nations in 1972, it is the largest global platform for public outreach on environmental issues, engaging governments, businesses, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and citizens worldwide. - DeepSeek

Visual arts exhibition calls for entries

Ida Cheong

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) announced in a statement on Tuesday that the 2026 Macau Annual Visual Arts Exhibition will accept submissions from next Friday through Sunday (June 12-14), between 10:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. at the Macau Museum of Art (MAM).

This year's exhibition calls for works in Western media, including two-dimensional, three-dimensional, videos, and multimedia creations. Participants must be aged 18 or above and hold a valid permanent or non-permanent Macau resident identity card (BIR), the statement said.

Participants can submit their applications individually or as a group, but each person/group may only submit one piece/set of work, and no double entries are allowed. All works must be original creations completed in 2024 or later, according to the statement.

The statement noted that the participants can submit their work, along with a completed and signed entry form and a copy of their Macau identity card, at the MAM during the specified period, according to the statement.

A new Jury Grand Prize will be presented to the winner, who will receive a cash prize of 80,000 patacas. The winning work will be displayed by the museum, while the winner will receive a certificate, the statement noted, adding that another new award, the Emerging Artist Prize (10,000 patacas), will be given to an artist aged 30 or younger to encourage young creators.

The Excellence Award (10 winners) continues with a cash prize of 30,000 patacas each. Furthermore, to support continued creativity and expand artistic exchange and exposure, all award winners will be invited to participate in a group exhibition to be held outside Macau by the bureau in the following year, the statement said.

The statement added that exhibition guidelines and entry forms are available to download on the Cultural Affairs Bureau website (www.icm.gov.mo) or can be obtained from the IC Visual Arts Division at the Tap Seac Creative Centre (commonly known as the Glass House). For enquiries, call 2836 6866 during office hours or email cam@icm.gov.mo. ■



This poster provided the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) on Tuesday shows the venue of the upcoming 2026 Macau Annual Visual Arts Exhibition at the Macau Museum of Art (MAM) in Nape, where entries can be submitted from next Friday through Sunday (Jun12-14).



Cosplayers pose at the Cosplay Hall during the inaugural three-day "Hong Kong Comic Con 2026" at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre (HKCEC) in Wan Chai on Saturday. – Photos: Khalel Vallo

Fans and creators praise debut HK Comic Con – despite crowd woes

Khalel Vallo in Hong Kong

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

Held from Friday through Sunday, the convention brought together comic book creators, entertainment personalities, collectors, and fans. Hong Kong icon Louis Koo Tin-lok, the convention's official ambassador, officiated at the opening ceremony on Friday morning. Addressing the ceremony, Koo reflected on the launch of the city's first Comic Con. "This year's Comic Con is the first in Hong Kong", Koo underlined, noting that organisers had spent the past few months preparing for the event and learning the process step by step. He added: "I hope that this year's Comic Con can help Hong Kong become a better city", encouraging attendees to give their feedback so future editions could continue to improve.

The exhibition floor featured a variety of themed attractions and merchandise booths, including an Artist Alley. Among the guest artists from the alley were Bob Layton, the "definitive artist" of Marvel Comics' Iron Man; Stephen Segovia, known for his works on Marvel and DC Comics; David Angelo Roman, recognised for work related to *Star Wars* and *Rick and Morty* projects; and Agnes Garbowska, known for her contributions to *My Little Pony* comics.

In addition, the event also hosted several international film and television personalities, featuring *Hannibal*'s Mads Mikkelsen, *Back to the Future*'s Christopher Lloyd, *The Walking Dead*'s Norman Reedus, *Stranger Things*' Jamie Campbell Bower, *Harry Potter*'s Katie Leung, *Breaking Bad*'s Giancarlo Esposito, *Star Wars*' Daniel Logan, and *Lovely Runner*'s Byeon Woo-seok.

Cosplayers from across the region also participated in the

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

Fans praise community, call for improvements

Visitors, cosplayers and international comic artists largely praised the inaugural Comic Con following its three-day run, although some attendees pointed to organisational issues, including queue management, staff conduct and limited resting facilities.

Speaking to the *Post*, Buck, 17, a visitor and cosplayer from Macau, said the convention offered valuable opportunities to meet new people and interact with fellow cosplayers, but expressed dissatisfaction with how some issues were handled by event staff. "To be honest, I enjoyed the people and the community but not the con and how it was managed", he said.

Buck said that staff responded unprofessionally after a ticketing error and also raised concerns over reports of cosplayers being photographed without consent. He added that the lack of seating, dining areas and adequate rest facilities negatively affected the visitor experience.

In contrast, Hong Kong-based cosplayer Greg, 20, described the event as one of the best conventions he had attended. "I loved the vibe and the sense of unity", he said, noting that visitors appeared focused on their shared interest in comics and films. Greg also praised the venue environment, saying it felt less crowded than other local conventions and remained relatively clean throughout the event.

Meanwhile Charlotte, 22, a tourist from the UK, described the convention as a balanced-sized event compared with conventions she had attended in Britain. "It's nice to see something different in the city [Hong Kong] as well", she said, adding that it was her first international Comic Con experience.

For 23-year-old Clark, another visitor from Macau, he was impressed by the event's attendance and international atmosphere. Compared with previous experiences at ACG* events, he observed a stronger presence of Western pop culture costumes and characters.

However, Clark noted congestion in the Artist Alley, where visitors struggled to move through crowded areas, and queues

occasionally became disorganised. "Overall, I am happy to have enjoyed the event", Clark said. "For a first-time event, it is a good experience."

Artists praise inaugural event

International comic creators attending the convention shared positive impressions of the event. Speaking to the *Post*, veteran comic book artist Bob Layton described the convention as one of the "strongest" Comic Con events he had ever attended in Asia.

"It's been incredibly well organised, they have a good guest list of real wonderful people, and they treat us all incredibly well", he said. Layton, widely recognised for his influential work on Iron Man, said one of his most significant contributions to the character was helping redefine Tony Stark as a flawed and vulnerable hero. Layton also said visiting Macau remains on his personal bucket list and indicated he would welcome an invitation to a future convention in the city should Macau ever host such an event.

Meanwhile, the *Rick and Morty* comic artist, David Angelo Roman, gave particularly strong praise for the convention. "For a first-time show, I have to say they're probably the most successful Comic Con for a first year that I've ever seen", he said. Roman said the level of fan engagement and interaction with creators exceeded his expectations, adding that Hong Kong's inaugural Comic Con ranked among the best conventions he had experienced internationally, citing that it was the second best after San Diego Comic Con in the US. Like Layton, Roman would also like to visit Macau if the city ever hosts a convention.

While attendees identified areas for improvement, particularly regarding crowd flow, visitor facilities and event operations, the convention's first edition received largely positive feedback from both fans and industry guests.

*ACG is the short form for ACGHK, which stands for Animation-Comic-Game Hong Kong and is held annually.



Festivalgoers pose with a Goku cosplayer beneath the large-scale figure at the convention.



Veteran comic book artist Bob Layton poses in his booth at the convention's Artist Alley.



My Little Pony comic artist Agnes Garbowska works on a commissioned piece for a fan from her booth.

The 'Kung Fu Kid' rocks the Galaxy at UFC Macau



This photo shows Song "Kung Fu Kid" Yadong (left) being declared the winner after his bout with Brazil's Deiveson "Deus da Guerra" Figueiredo at UFC FIGHT NIGHT in Galaxy Arena.

Stefan Hammond

Riding the LRT out to Cotai presents a panorama of Macau glories past and present. The rubber-tired two-carriage trains cruise past the overgrown ruins of the Macau Jockey Club – faded paint on concrete blocks as former stables bake in the late-May summer sun.

Overlooking the fuzzy green track: the Zhuhai skyline (the dream of an architect's drawing) and the gilded steeples of the Galaxy Macau complex. At last count: 550,000 square metres, 10 hotels, a convention centre, a shopping promenade, and a casino. And the Galaxy Arena – host to three nights of UFC fighting, a total of 33 bouts of MMA (mixed martial arts) last month.

'Kung Fu Kid' defeats the 'God of War'

UFC Fight Night: Song vs. Figueiredo sold out the arena within two hours of its announcement. Saturday night's main event featured Song "Kung Fu Kid" Yadong (宋亚东) versus Deiveson "Deus da Guerra" ("God of War") Figueiredo. It culminated when the 28-year-old Harbin-born Song slapped a

guillotine choke on the Brazilian veteran and forced him to tap out.

The hometown fans were delighted, especially after the co-main event, which saw Zhang "Mountain Tiger" Mingyang (张名扬) bested by Texas-based fighter Alonzo "Atomic" Menifield via first-round TKO finish.

Moscow, da ('yes' in Russian), California, not so much

The night's pugilists also featured Russian heavyweight Sergei Pavlovich, who squared off against Brazilian Tallison "Xicão" ("Big Francisco") Teixeira. The Muscovite dispatched Teixeira via TKO (technical knockout) in 39 seconds, then waved to cheers from the crowd of 12,647 (official attendance).

Fighters from other lands were not so lauded. Californian Alex Perez received a regrettable low blow from fellow flyweight Sumudaerji "The Tibetan Eagle" and spent an allotted five-minute timeout hunched over a bucket in the cage. The fight was declared a no-contest and as Perez exited the arena on



US fighter Alonzo "Atomic" Menifield (left) winds up to strike Zhang Mingyang, aka the "Mountain Tiger", during their co-main fight on Saturday's "UFC FIGHT NIGHT". – Photos courtesy of Getty Images/UFC

his way to the hospital, boos reverberated. Were those small objects this reporter saw flying in his direction?

Battle of the nicknames

Cage fighters love predatory nicknames, but aggressive nomenclature often failed during the Macau melee. Cameron "The Baby-Faced Killa" Smotherman succumbed to the even more baby-faced Kai Asakura (朝倉海) via left-hook knockout in the first round.

Aoriqileng "The Mongolian Murderer" (傲日其楞) lost his homicidal aura in the second round against Australia's Cody Haddon when he too was knocked out. And Rodrigo "El Gato Loco" ("The Crazy Cat") Vera went a bit crazy on his opponent, fellow featherweight Zhu Kangjie (朱康杰), aka "The Hypnotist", knocking out the Hefei-born Zhu in the first round.

One of the evening's highlights was veteran straw weight Angela "Overkill" Hill against Xiong "The Panda" Jingnan (熊竞楠). The fight was Hill's thirtieth in the organisation and Xiong's first UFC tussle.

Both fighters held championship belts in other fight organisations, and Xiong's wars with Angela "Unstoppable" Lee are the stuff of women's MMA legend. In the event, Hill turned in a masterful, workmanlike performance to earn a unanimous decision win over the Jining-born fighter.

In the only other WMMA match of the evening, Loma Lookboonmee, the sole Thai fighter on the UFC roster, lost via submission to Brazilian Jaqueline Amorim, who used an armbar to defeat the Buriram native in the first round. No nicknames were involved.

UFC: bullish on China

The Galaxy Arena, which officially opened in 2023, seems an ideal venue for the Las Vegas-based promotion, which opened its Shanghai Performance Institute gym in 2019. That same year, UFC Fight Night Shenzhen was held at the Universiade Sports Centre.

The organisation has held numerous events in Shanghai, and its next event is a fight card scheduled for August 29 at the Shanghai Indoor Stadium. Fighters has yet to be announced. ■

Govt appoints ex-secretary Tai, ex-sports chief Pun to airport operator's board

Tony Wong

Anton Tai Kin Ip, who had served as the Macau Special Administrative Region's (MSAR) secretary for economy and finance since December 20, 2024 until his sudden resignation on April 16 this year, has been appointed by the local government to local airport operator CAM's board of directors.

The local government has also appointed Pun Weng Kun, the former president of the Sports Bureau (ID), to CAM's board of directors.

The local government has appointed six members of CAM's board of directors, through an executive order by Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai published in the Official Gazette (BO) yesterday, for a three-year term effective from yesterday.

The six members appointed by Sam comprise 72-year-old Chui Sai Cheong, Zhang Yun, Simon Chan Weng Hong, Anton Tai Kin Ip, Pun Weng Kun, and Wu Keng Kuong, of whom Chui has been appointed as the board's chairman, replacing 81-year-old Ma Iao Hang.

Among the six, Chan is the only member reappointed to the board of directors.

Chui is the former vice-president of the MSAR's Legislative Assembly (AL), serving between October 16, 2017 and October 15 last year.

Among the six appointed to the board of directors, Zhang, Chan, Tai, and Pun have been appointed to CAM's executive committee, of whom Zhang has been appointed as the executive committee's chairman, replacing Chan.

Chan had headed the Macau Civil Aviation Authority (AACM) since 2006 until March 2023 when he was first appointed by the government to CAM's board of directors. He was then also appointed as the chairman of the airport operator's executive committee.

The new appointments announced yesterday mean that Chan himself remains as a member of CAM's executive committee.

According to the CAM website, Ma has now become the chairman of the airport operator's general assembly.

Upon Sam's proposal, the State Council

decided on April 16 this year to remove Tai from the position of the MSAR's secretary for economy and finance after he had submitted his resignation to Sam "for personal reasons".

Tai's resignation took effect on April 16. It had been less than 16 months since he took office as the MSAR's secretary for economy and finance on December 20, 2024.

Tai, born in 1968 in Macau, had been the director of the Economic Services Bureau – which was upgraded to the current Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSED) in 2021 – since April 2016 until he became the secretary for economy and finance.

No replacement has been appointed yet for the position of the MSAR's secretary for economy and finance.



This file photo taken last year shows travellers in the local airport's departure hall. – Photo: Tony Wong

Observatory warns of even hotter days ahead



A queue forms in front of MIXUE, in Senado Square, which specialises in ice cream and tea-based drinks, yesterday as people try their best to beat the heat. — Photo: Rui Pastorin

Rui Pastorin

As Macau grapples with sweltering heat, the local observatory warned on its website yesterday that temperatures will continue to remain high today and tomorrow.

The city has been seeing high temperatures for the past few days, with the Yellow Hot Weather warning, the lower of Macau's two-level weather warnings that indicates it is "very hot" in Macau, put up accordingly.

According to the Macau Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) website yesterday, temperatures will soar to 33 degrees or higher, noting that it will be "very hot" between today and tomorrow. Members of the public

were reminded to stay hydrated and beware of heatstroke.

In a separate SMG statement, it was noted that temperatures may rise in the next two to three days due to a blanket of upper-air anticyclone and weak winds, adding that maximum temperatures could generally reach 34 degrees or above across various districts, or potentially two to three degrees higher in urban areas. Brief, heavy thunderstorms from the afternoon to evening may also be triggered by the rising mercury, the statement said.

Meanwhile, next week, a burst of the southwest monsoon will bring a vast amount of warm, humid moisture to the South China coast and ushering in "the

peak rainfall period of the 'pre-flood season'". A low-pressure trough will begin to affect the South China coast early next week. Combined, the statement said that showers and thunderstorms might increase starting Sunday and last for several days.

At the same time, the statement said, a low-pressure area located in the central part of the South China Sea might develop into a tropical cyclone, generally heading toward the vicinity of China's Taiwan region, so that the risk of directly affecting Macau "remains low". The bureau will closely monitor the situation, the statement added.

More information can be found on the SMG website. ■

Govt launches tender for up to 700 new taxis, only firms can bid

Continued from p.1

Each company can only bid for one taxi-operating licence comprising up to 50 taxis. The minimum bid is set at 2.5 million patacas. Each bidder will be required to pay a deposit of 3.5 million patacas, according to yesterday's announcement.

Bid-assessment criteria

According to yesterday's gazette, the bids will be assessed based on three criteria, namely the proposed price accounting for 60 percent of the scores, the proposed plan for how to run its fleet of taxis accounting for 34 percent, and the proposed percentage of the employment of local residents in relation to the total number of employees (six percent of the total scores).

Before the current taxi law took effect in 2019 – when common taxi-vehicle licences were granted to individuals, those who proposed the highest bids were granted a licence during a public tender.

Yesterday's statement underlined that the government has decided to launch the new public tender in the wake of the fact that more and more eight-year-validity common taxi-vehicle licences have gradually expired over the past few years. The statement said that the tender also "aims to tackle" the city's ongoing demand for taxi services.

According to latest data on the DSAT website, at the end of the first quarter of this year, there were 1,454 taxis in service in the city, comprising 1,254 "common" taxis and 200 "special" taxis.

This time, according to yesterday's DSAT statement, the winning companies must use hybrid vehicles (powered by a combination of an internal combustion engine and an electric motor), or new energy vehicles (NEVs), with a seating capacity of six or more passengers.

Moreover, the statement said, all the new taxis must accept e-payments.

At least two of each winning company's 50 new taxis must be wheelchair-accessible ones, the statement said. ■

Chinese AI team unveils new framework boosting industry application

BEIJING – Chinese artificial intelligence (AI) researchers have released an open-source framework and a real-world scenario competition platform that significantly improves AI industrial application.

As AI computing power grows stronger and large language models become increasingly sophisticated, Chinese researchers have been focused on how best to apply it to real-world scenarios.

To this end, a research initiative at the Artificial Intelligence Innovation Center at Yangtze Delta Region Institute of Tsinghua University standardized human-machine interaction, task-set mechanisms and human feedback systems, resulting in enhanced industrial application efficiency and greater enterprise deployment.

The team leader said that the global AI industry currently faces a structural contradiction: the exponential growth of model and tool capabilities versus the linear climb in industrial adoption rates. The core contradiction in AI development has shifted from "enhancing model intelligence" to "bridging the deployment gap."

REAL-WORLD FRAMEWORK

To address the gap between AI capabilities and real-world deployment, the team released the Real World AI (RWAI) open-source framework, expanding the scope of open-source efforts from code and tools to encompass role definitions, workflow design, human-machine interaction, and human-human collaboration as an integrated practice.

The framework reconstructs the interaction between AI and humans in real-world tasks through three core elements: restoring real-world task sets, capturing authentic human feedback from real interactions, and standardizing human-machine interaction protocols.

According to the team, the real-world tests have proven that RWAI outperforms traditional software development models in practical efficiency, actual effectiveness and resolution time, reducing pre-project validation timelines from two-to-three months to less than two weeks.

The team also launched the AI arena platform. Unlike traditional benchmarks or model leader boards, the platform focuses on evaluating the actual effectiveness of AI solutions in real business operations, including metrics such as organizational costs, time efficiency, computing costs and compliance requirements.

The platform adopts a "challenger-champion" mechanism, where competing entities are not single models but complete solutions, encompassing team configurations, workflows, agent combinations, and context engineering. The best-practice workflows corresponding to winning solutions will be made public and available for replication.

INDUSTRIAL APPLICATIONS

China Southern Power Grid's internet service subsidiary utilized RWAI platform to address the end-to-end safety management

challenges of power grid infrastructure projects, ranging from planning to on-site execution. Faced with complex compliance requirements, traditional manual supervision on infrastructure projects had reached an efficiency bottleneck.

Using the platform, the company developed an intelligent risk control solution for on-site and subcontractor management, increasing hidden risk detection rates by approximately 40 percent and boosting risk warning accuracy to 92 percent. The company and research team are now preparing to advance a demonstration project for generative AI across the full lifecycle of construction planning.

The company's senior engineer Hu Rui said the RWAI platform had successfully bridged the gap between AI technology and deployment, while significantly reducing trial-and-error costs. The system has transformed engineering management from reactive response to proactive intelligent control, using AI to support high-quality power grid construction.

Jiangsu Eastern Shenghong Co., Ltd. also used the RWAI platform. As a petrochemical manufacturer, it has long faced challenges such as integrating knowledge in traditional process industries, applying general-purpose AI to core business operations, and the lack of controllability in decision-making by large models.

Leveraging the RWAI platform, Eastern Shenghong integrated 30 years of production process knowledge with data from the full

industry chain, overcoming the scarcity of chemical industry corpora and high-compliance barriers to build an industrial large model that truly understands the business.

Through multimodal fault monitoring and prediction, the company has significantly reduced unplanned downtime in key production lines and can dynamically recommend optimal production scheduling, achieving cost reduction, efficiency improvement, and process optimization.

Yang Tianwei, vice chairman of the company and general manager of its AI business unit, said that by using the RWAI platform's evaluation capabilities, they have transformed internally validated, high-quality model capabilities into a library of reusable, billable, and composable products.

"This not only activates Eastern Shenghong's own intelligent development, but also provides a field-proven and best-practice solution for deploying large models in the process industries," Yang added.

The RWAI platform now covers multiple application scenarios including industrial forecasting systems, document review and risk control, and research report generation. Its implementations have already been deployed in projects for some Fortune Global 500 companies.

The research team said that the platform will also supply real-world human-computer interaction data to support large model development and academic research.

— Xinhua

China expresses deep concern over further escalation of situation in Middle East: FM spokesperson

BEIJING – China is deeply concerned over the renewed escalation of situation in the Middle East, and hopes that relevant parties will work to create necessary conditions for restoring peace and tranquility to the Middle East and Gulf region, a foreign ministry spokesperson said yesterday.

Spokesperson Mao Ning made the remarks at a daily press briefing in response to the recent mutual attacks between the United States and Iran.

Mao said the renewed warfare serves no one's interest, adding China hopes that relevant parties can cherish the opportunity for peace, fulfill ceasefire commitment, keep the momentum of negotiation, stick to dispute settlement through political and diplomatic means, and realize comprehensive and lasting ceasefire at an early date, so as to create necessary conditions for restoring peace and tranquility to the Middle East and Gulf region. – *Xinhua*

China's industrial subsidy policy strictly within WTO rules: FM spokesperson

BEIJING – China's industrial subsidy policy is strictly within World Trade Organization (WTO) rules, foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said yesterday.

Mao made the remarks at a daily press briefing when asked to comment on a report released by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) related to industrial subsidies.

Mao said that Chinese firms make their way to the top not on subsidies, but through market

competition, tireless innovation, global presence and the advantage of China's mega-sized market.

Noting that China's industrial subsidy policy is based on openness, fairness, and compliance, and strictly within WTO rules, Mao said industrial subsidies are commonly used worldwide.

What matters is whether they comply with WTO rules, said Mao, adding that it is hoped that the international organization will play a constructive role rather than the other way around. – *Xinhua*

Playing on words will by no means whitewash Japan's moves of rearmament: FM spokesperson

BEIJING – Playing on words will by no means whitewash Japan's moves of rearmament, foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said yesterday, after a spokesperson for Japan's Defense Ministry recently made relevant erroneous remarks.

In response to a query at a daily press briefing, Mao said Japan packages overseas military deployment as exercising the rights to collective self-defense, glosses over its buildup of offensive capabilities as acquiring

counterstrike capabilities and covers up its exports of lethal weapons with the so-called "equipment technology cooperation."

Japan's justification for its behavior is better characterized as evasion and denial, which is nothing but camouflage for remilitarization, said Mao.

The Japanese side has been mum about the militarist invasion and war crimes, still less Japan's obligations under international law. To this day, Japan remains unrepentant over its dark history, Mao added. – *Xinhua*

12.9 million students to join annual college entrance exam

BEIJING – A total of 12.9 million Chinese students are set to sit this year's national college entrance exam, also known as the gaokao ("higher examination"), starting this Sunday, the Ministry of Education announced on yesterday.

This figure marks a slight drop from last year's number of 13.35 million participants.

The ministry said local authorities will be instructed to maintain a secure online environment for the exam and a

safe, orderly environment around exam sites.

Special campaigns will be launched to crack down on the sale of cheating devices, exam impersonation, and irregular practices by exam-preparation and training institutions, the ministry said.

The ministry will also guide local authorities in preventing and combating high-tech cheating and actively promote the use of intelligent monitoring and inspection systems. – *Xinhua*

VP Han meets candidate for next UN secretary-general Bachelet

BEIJING – Vice President Han Zheng met with Michelle Bachelet, candidate for the next United Nations (UN) secretary-general, yesterday in Beijing.

Han said China is willing to work with all parties and continue to firmly support the core role of the UN, so as to promote the building of a more just and reasonable global governance system.

As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, China will earnestly fulfill its responsibilities, continue to uphold an impartial position, safeguard the authority of the UN, and protect the common interests of the Global South, Han said.

Bachelet expressed her high appreciation for China's long-term and firm commitment to promoting multilateralism and the cause of the UN, supporting the balanced advancement of peace, development and human rights, which are the three pillars of the UN, adhering to the member state-led principle, and supporting the UN in further improving quality and efficiency through reform.

She expressed her readiness



Vice President Han Zheng (right) shakes hands with Michelle Bachelet, candidate for the next United Nations (UN) secretary-general, in Beijing yesterday. – AFP

to work with China to follow the original aspiration and purpose of the UN and jointly strengthen the role of the UN. – *Xinhua*

Betting on 'Taiwan independence' will only cost Eswatini its development opportunities: FM spokesperson

BEIJING – Betting on "Taiwan independence" has no future and will only cost Eswatini its development opportunities, foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said yesterday.

According to media in Africa and the Taiwan region, before and after Lai Ching-te's visit to Eswatini, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) authorities provided the country with 25 billion or so New Taiwan dollars worth of funding, and pledged that the income of related project belongs entirely to the king and the royal family. Taiwan's representatives in Eswatini will also profit from that.

Mao said those reports are yet another example of how far the Lai Ching-te authorities would go to selfishly advance their "Taiwan independence" agenda.

Their expensive dollar diplomacy has cost the people of Taiwan dearly, equivalent to levying more than 1,000 New Taiwan dollars (US\$31.76) on every person in Taiwan, Mao said, adding that having Eswatini as a "diplomatic ally" is not about delivering real benefits for the people, but to line the pockets of the very few people who profit from it.

This is political theatrics steeped in greed and graft, Mao added.

Noting the one-China principle is a prevailing international consensus and a basic norm governing international relations, Mao cited China's zero-tariff treatment for all 53 African countries that have diplomatic relations with China, pointing out that Eswatini is the only country left in Africa with so-called "diplomatic ties" with Taiwan.

Betting on "Taiwan independence" has no future, and it will only cost Eswatini its development opportunities and land the country in international isolation, Mao said.

– *Xinhua, MPD*

Sinologists conference kicks off in Dunhuang

LANZHOU – The Third World Conference of Sinologists opened yesterday in Dunhuang, a key hub on the ancient Silk Road in northwest China's Gansu Province. The event has seen scholars and cultural figures from around the world explore how Chinese civilization can contribute to addressing shared global challenges amid growing uncertainty.

Themed "Pooling Wisdom of Civilizations to Jointly Address Challenges of Our Times," the event has attracted over 300 delegates from around 70 countries.

Sinology originated in China, belongs to the world, and is a shared intellectual treasure of all humanity, said Mulatu Teshome

Wirtu, a Sinologist and former president of Ethiopia, at the opening ceremony.

"The event contributes to the construction of new and enduring bridges toward a world founded upon mutual trust, shared human dignity, empathy, and sustainable peace," said Tiziana Lippiello, rector of Ca'Foscari University of Venice.

She added that history, culture, and imagination meet across centuries in Dunhuang, which offers a particularly meaningful setting for current-day dialogue.

During the conference, four sub-forums are scheduled on topics including the global significance of Chinese modernization, the peace-oriented values embedded in

Chinese civilization, the historical evolution of Sinology and cross-cultural exchanges, as well as the contemporary relevance of traditional Chinese philosophical thought.

The choice of Dunhuang as host city carries special symbolic significance. Over 2,000 years ago, the city served as a vital crossroads on the ancient Silk Road, witnessing the movement of Chinese silk and tea to the West and the arrival in China of once alien produce such as grapes, carrots and pomegranates.

Today, Dunhuang remains a major cultural landmark, home to three UNESCO World Heritage sites and more than 260 registered cultural relic sites. – *Xinhua*

Thailand ready for UN mediation on maritime dispute with Cambodia

BANGKOK – Thailand is “fully prepared” to engage in UN-backed mediation initiated by Cambodia over disputed maritime claims, the foreign minister said yesterday, while pledging to safeguard national interests.

Neighbouring Cambodia said Tuesday it had started the dispute resolution process under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) over disputed areas in the Gulf of Thailand, where

undersea energy reserves are valued at around US\$300 billion.

The move followed Bangkok’s cancellation last month of a 2001 agreement that established a framework for joint oil and gas exploration in areas of overlapping claims, with Thailand’s prime minister citing a long-standing stalemate in implementing it.

Thailand’s Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuanketkeow said in a statement yesterday that Cambodia’s

“rushed decision” to begin compulsory conciliation proceedings under UNCLOS could hinder efforts to “rebuild trust and confidence towards restoring bilateral relations”.

The Southeast Asian neighbours have disputed maritime territories and the demarcation of their 800-kilometre land border for decades, a legacy of the French colonial era.

After two rounds of deadly border clashes last year, the two sides agreed to a ceasefire in December

but have repeatedly accused each other of truce violations.

“Thailand is fully prepared to undertake all necessary actions in accordance with UNCLOS, placing the utmost importance on safeguarding the country’s interests,” Sihasak said in the statement.

Both countries are parties to the convention.

The conciliation process results in non-legally-binding recommendations for the parties

to use to negotiate a resolution, according to the Thai statement.

Thailand’s energy ministry has estimated future revenues from oil and natural gas in the area to be worth around US\$300 billion.

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet said Tuesday that his government had begun the mediation process to “protect Cambodia’s sovereignty and maritime rights in accordance with international law”. –AFP

Ex-PM Thaksin eligible for pardon: justice minister

BANGKOK – Thailand’s former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra has met the conditions for a royal pardon as part of clemency measure marking the queen’s birthday, the justice minister said yesterday.

Thaksin, 76, served eight months of a one-year sentence for corruption and abuse of power before he was released on parole last month due to his age.

The Department of Corrections said the ex-premier was required to wear an electronic monitoring device as a condition of his release.

Justice Minister Rutthapon Naowarat said yesterday that Thaksin was among those eligible

for the latest royal clemency measure.

“He is on the list,” Rutthapon told reporters at a royal ceremony.

“He had less than one year remaining of his sentence.”

Thaksin’s lawyer Winyat Chatmontree told AFP a government committee would still need to decide whether his monitoring device would be removed.

Thailand regularly grants royal pardons to prisoners with good conduct to mark major royal occasions, including the birthdays of the king and the queen.

Thaksin is one of the most influential figures in modern Thai

politics and served two terms as prime minister.

His second term was cut short by a military coup in 2006, after which he spent more than a decade in exile before returning to Thailand in 2023.

His Pheu Thai party, and its earlier iterations, was Thailand’s most successful political party of the 21st century, with the Shinawatra family producing four prime ministers and drawing widespread support from the rural masses.

But Pheu Thai had its worst election result ever in February, slipping to third place and raising questions about the future of Thaksin’s political machine. –AFP

Philippine senators name new leader, sidestepping pro-Duterte boycott

Jamillah Sta Rosa

MANILA – A group of Philippine lawmakers wrested back control of a bitterly divided Senate yesterday, electing an acting president amid a boycott by Vice President Sara Duterte’s supporters ahead of her impeachment trial.

Pro-Duterte lawmakers began their Senate boycott this week after losing majority control, with one lawmaker arrested for large-scale corruption and another in hiding to avoid arrest by the International Criminal Court.

The change in leadership was made possible after Senator Francis Escudero from the pro-Duterte bloc attended the session, allowing lawmakers to reach a quorum and elect Sherwin Gatchalian in a temporary capacity.

“The Senate has been adjourned and unable to resume session for the past two days, placing us on the brink of constitutional violation had we not convened today [yesterday],” Gatchalian said.

He said the quorum was calculated based on a “majority of the 22 senators over whom jurisdiction can be obtained by the Senate” – not including the lawmaker who was arrested and the other in hiding.

Senator Alan Peter Cayetano, leader of the pro-Duterte bloc, challenged the constitutionality of the vote, arguing that the entire 24-member chamber should have been counted.

“The majority is 13,” Cayetano said in a video message posted on social media.

“Has Philippine democracy died again? Has the Philippine Constitution been thrown out?” he said.

The presidency said the developments were in accordance with the law.

“The palace recognises and respects the decision of the new majority and the leadership of Acting Senate President Sherwin Gatchalian,” spokeswoman Claire Castro told reporters.

‘Some form of stability’

The surprise move came hours after President Ferdinand Marcos warned that important laws may be derailed if senators continue to boycott sessions.

“The legislature is now in disarray,” Marcos told reporters earlier yesterday.

“Get back to work because it’s important... We have to pass a lot of laws.”



Philippine Senator Sherwin Gatchalian presides as Senate Pro Tempore during the plenary session at the Senate of the Philippines in Pasay, Metro Manila yesterday. –AFP

Marcos said his team was looking at possible laws and amendments to aid Filipinos as the Middle East war sends shockwaves through the global economy.

“We are trying to achieve some form of stability so that people can go on with their lives and plan ahead for their future, so that people can count on the assistance of government during this time of an emergency,” the president said.

“We cannot do that if the legislature decides to stay at home and have a vacation.”

The Philippine Constitution states that the executive is co-equal to the legislature, limiting Marcos’s options.

“We cannot tell them what to do, we cannot punish them for what they are doing,” Marcos said.

Last month, the 13 lawmakers allied with Duterte took control of the 24-seat Senate just hours before the House of Representatives voted to impeach the vice president.

Four days later, Duterte ally Ronald Dela Rosa fled after the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant against him.

Another pro-Duterte senator, Jose “Jinggoy” Estrada, was arrested on Monday for allegedly receiving kickbacks worth more than 573 million pesos (US\$9.3 million) over a flood control project.

Cayetano justified the boycott by saying the body was being “held by the throat” and that majority members are being eliminated.

The vice president’s Senate impeachment trial is expected to begin on July 6. Duterte only needs nine votes from the senator-judges for her to be acquitted. –AFP

Indonesia arrests sacked head of free meal scheme

JAKARTA – Indonesian officials arrested yesterday the former head of the country’s free school meals programme, blighted by mass food poisonings and corruption claims, a day after he was fired.

The much-hyped billion-dollar feeding scheme was the flagship policy of President Prabowo Subianto’s 2024 election campaign.

Prabowo fired Dadan Hindayana, an entomologist who had led the National Nutrition Agency since its inception in August 2024, along with two deputies on Tuesday. All three were taken into custody in Jakarta yesterday.”

They stand accused of “crimes in the management” of the agency, Syarif Sulaeman Nahdi of the attorney general’s office told reporters.

Authorities earlier raided the nutrition agency’s office as well as the homes of the three defendants, Syarif said.

The government says the programme has provided meals to more than 61 million people by March, but tens of thousands of people have fallen ill since it was rolled out in January last year.

Critics have called for the scheme to be suspended over hygiene concerns and accusations of corruption.

Anti-graft NGO Indonesia Corruption Watch said that removing the agency’s head “does not solve the problem”, calling for the programme to be terminated and its budget reallocated.

The watchdog filed last month a complaint against Dadan citing alleged budget irregularities.

Syarief said yesterday that



Dadan Hindayana (centre), former head of Indonesia’s free school meals programme, is escorted by officers from the Attorney General’s Office and Indonesian military personnel as he leaves the Attorney General’s Office building in Jakarta yesterday, following questioning over alleged misappropriation in the implementation of the programme. –AFP

foundations appointed by the three defendants to oversee kitchens were allegedly “used as vehicles for crimes”.

“Those foundations received billions of rupiahs in incentives every day, and those foundations were affiliated, owned by” the suspects, he added.

The trio are also accused of overseeing illicit procurement of electric motorbikes, shoes, tablets and television sets.

If found guilty, they could face life imprisonment.

Stunting

The free meal scheme had a goal of reaching at least 82.9 million children and pregnant and breastfeeding women – nearly one-third of the country’s population.

More than 20 percent of

children in Indonesia are affected by stunting caused by severe malnutrition.

The programme was among the first budget items to be cut back as Jakarta moved to counter the economic impact of the Middle East war.

Dadan, who just Tuesday attended an official event by Prabowo’s side, told parliament last year the programme was responsible for at least 11,000 poisoning cases, with over 600 people hospitalised.

Prabowo has also acknowledged problems and vowed to discipline anyone found guilty of wrongdoing.

Announcing Dadan’s dismissal on Tuesday, State Secretary Prasetyo Hadi said “all programmes of the National Nutrition Agency will continue to run as they should”. –AFP

Storm Jangmi dumps torrential rain on Tokyo

TOKYO – A severe tropical storm brought torrential rain to Tokyo yesterday, swelling rivers, grounding flights and sparking calls to evacuate for hundreds of thousands of people across wide swathes of Japan.

Many trains were largely deserted in and around Tokyo, as commuters in the usually bustling megacity stayed home to escape Storm Jangmi's deluge.

Some railway services were delayed or cancelled in the country whose public transport system prides itself on on-the-dot punctuality.

The storm also forced school closures.

As Jangmi rolled in from southern Japan, authorities urged around 370,000 people from Tokyo to western Shikoku island to evacuate.

"Please continue to pay close attention to evacuation information from your local authorities, and if you feel even the slightest sense of danger, do not hesitate to take early action to protect your life," top government spokesman Minoru Kihara told a news conference Wednesday.

The storm has flooded streets, toppled trees, triggered landslides

and closed some expressways, Kihara said, adding "approximately 60,000" power outages have been confirmed.

"Even in areas where the rain has subsided, the ground may have been loosened by previous rainfall and the risk of landslides remains," he cautioned.

Japan's two biggest airlines All Nippon Airways and Japan Airlines cancelled a combined 616 flights – including 92 international flights – scheduled for yesterday.

At Tokyo's Haneda airport, large screens showed most international flights bound for cities like Sydney, Singapore, London and Bangkok had been either cancelled or delayed, an AFP reporter saw.

Torrential rain filled rivers in western and eastern Japan including in the Tokyo area, although the Japan Meteorological Agency lifted many of the flood warnings in place earlier in the day.

Around 3:45 p.m. [local time], the storm appeared to be moving away from Japan, on an eastern trajectory towards the Pacific Ocean.

On Tuesday, the storm injured 15 people in the south of the country.

– AFP/MPD



This photograph taken on May 20, shows mountaineers climbing a slope queuing during their ascent to summit Mount Everest in Nepal.

More than one thousand climbers reached the summit of Mount Everest this season, officials said yesterday, making it the busiest season on record.

– AFP

Bangladeshi FM elected president of UN General Assembly

UNITED NATIONS, USA – Bangladesh's top diplomat was elected president of the 81st UN General Assembly on Tuesday in a vote that, unusually, featured more than one candidate.

Khalilur Rahman won 99 votes in the secret ballot compared to 91 for Cypriot diplomat Andreas Kakouris.

He will succeed the outgoing president – Germany's former foreign minister Annalena Baerbock – in September.

Rahman became foreign minister in February, following Bangladesh's first elections since the 2024 ouster of longtime premier Sheikh Hasina.

During the interim government of Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, Rahman served as national

security advisor and point person on the country's huge population of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar.

Rahman holds degrees in law and economics from US universities and has participated in trade talks with Washington.

The president of the UN General Assembly is elected annually for a one-year term based on a geographical rotation, but there is rarely more than one candidate, who is usually accepted by unanimous consent.

This year, the position was allocated to the Asia-Pacific region, which includes Cyprus.

A third diplomat who had declared his candidacy – Palestinian Ambassador to the UN Riyad Mansour – withdrew after it was strongly criticized by Israel. – AFP

New Delhi hotel blaze kills 21, including foreigners

NEW DELHI – A fire ripped through a hotel in New Delhi yesterday, killing at least 21 people, many of them foreign nationals, police and local media said.

Building fires are common in India due to a lack of firefighting equipment and routine disregard for safety regulations.

The fire broke out in the morning at Flourish Stay, a bed-and-breakfast in a congested neighbourhood in the south of the city, Delhi Police said in a statement.

"It is with profound sorrow that 21 persons have been declared dead in this tragic incident," police said.

Several of those killed were foreigners, mainly from Central Asia and Africa, the Press Trust of India news agency reported, quoting unnamed officials.

Many of them had come to the city for medical treatment, according to local media reports.

Authorities said more than 40 people were taken to hospitals for treatment.

Eight were in a critical condition, according to a statement by a nearby hospital.

Indian television channels showed flames leaping from the building and thick plumes of black smoke rising into the sky.

Some 47 guests were in the hotel when the fire broke out, local lawmaker Satish Upadhyay told reporters.

Locals rushed to the site, as firefighters worked to douse the blaze and ambulances arrived to transport the injured.



Forensics team members take photographs of the site following a fire that broke out at a hotel in New Delhi, India yesterday.

At least 21 people were killed when a fire ripped through a hotel in New Delhi yesterday, police said, in one of the deadliest blazes in the Indian capital in recent years.

– AFP

Prime Minister Narendra Modi called the deaths "tragic".

"My condolences to those who have lost their loved ones," his office said in a statement.

'Jumped from the building'

Some reports suggested the hotel had just one door for entry and exit and lacked proper ventilation.

"An inquiry will be conducted, and anyone who has broken norms and is responsible will be immediately arrested," Upadhyay said.

Some people trapped on the upper floors of the building jumped onto mattresses laid out on the street outside, said eyewitnesses.

"We got mattresses from a nearby bedding shop because people needed to be rescued," Mohammad Anees, a local resident, told AFP.

"Once the mattresses were laid out, five women jumped from the building and landed safely on them."

The blaze was eventually brought under control with the help of eight fire engines, police said.

The cause of the fire, one of the deadliest blazes in the Indian capital in recent years, was not immediately clear.

Electrical short circuits, often caused by poorly maintained wiring, remain the leading cause of fire incidents in India.

In March, a fire at a government-run hospital in eastern India killed 10 critically ill patients.

The last major fire incident in Delhi killed 43 factory workers sleeping in a building in the city's old quarter in 2019. – AFP

Sri Lanka slaps travel ban on ex-president over Easter bombings

COLOMBO – A Sri Lankan court imposed a foreign travel ban on former president Gotabaya Rajapaksa yesterday as investigators widened their probe into the deadly 2019 Easter Sunday bombings.

Rajapaksa's then-intelligence chief, Suresh Sallay, has been detained since February after being accused of orchestrating the attacks which killed 279 people – an allegation he denies.

The Colombo Fort Magistrate ordered immigration authorities to prevent Rajapaksa and two other military intelligence officers from leaving the country.

"Should these three individuals travel abroad, it would be an obstacle to continuing investigations," detectives told the magistrate.

The Criminal Investigations Department stopped short of naming Rajapaksa as a suspect, but it is the first time he has been directly linked to the case as a "person of interest".

The coordinated bombings targeted three upmarket hotels in the capital Colombo, two Roman Catholic churches and an evangelical Protestant church outside the city.

Among the 279 people killed were 45 foreigners, while more than 500 were wounded in the attacks blamed on a homegrown jihadist group.

Sallay, a retired major general who headed the Military Intelligence, was made State Intelligence Service chief in 2019 immediately after Rajapaksa became president, and is accused of involvement in

organising the bombings.

British broadcaster Channel 4 reported in 2023 that Sallay was linked to the Islamist bombers and had met them prior to the attacks.

A whistleblower told the network that Sallay had permitted the attack to proceed with the intention of influencing that year's presidential election in favour of Rajapaksa.

Two days after the bombings, Rajapaksa declared his candidacy and went on to win the November vote in a landslide after promising to stamp out Islamist extremism.

However, Rajapaksa was forced to resign halfway into his presidency in July 2022 after months of street protests over acute shortages of food, fuel and medicines. – AFP

Sri Lankan care home fire kills 5: police

COLOMBO – A fire swept through an elder care home in Sri Lanka yesterday, killing at least five residents, police said, with six others missing.

Firefighters called to the facility in Batagoda, south of the capital Colombo, found the charred

remains of the five dead.

Police said rescuers and locals were able to evacuate 44 residents from the facility, which was completely destroyed in the blaze.

Several people were hospitalised for smoke inhalation.

"We have called forensic teams to investigate the cause of the fire," a police officer at the scene told reporters.

Fire accidents are rare in Sri Lanka. Four people were killed in a petrol station fire in April last year.

– AFP

Hezbollah says attacked Israel as Lebanon reports 9 killed in Israeli strikes



Relatives of a man who was killed along with his son and daughter in an Israeli strike that targeted their car earlier this week in southern Lebanon mourn over their coffins during their funeral in the Christian border village of Qlayaa yesterday. Lebanon's public university said on Tuesday it was postponing some examinations after two students and their father were killed while returning to south Lebanon after sitting exams a day earlier. The state-run National News Agency (NNA) said a dentist from the border village of Qlayaa "was killed with his son and daughter when an enemy drone targeted his car on the Nabatieh-Khardali road" on Monday. — AFP

BEIRUT – Lebanon's Hezbollah said it had attacked troops in northern Israel yesterday, as Israeli strikes killed at least nine people in southern Lebanon, dampening hopes for an end to the cycle of violence.

US President Donald Trump announced on Monday that he had brokered a deal that Lebanon said would halt Israeli attacks on Beirut and Hezbollah attacks on Israeli territory, before expanding in scope.

Since then, Israel has said it has Washington's backing to strike Beirut's southern suburbs – a Hezbollah stronghold – if the group targets northern Israeli communities.

The Israeli military said yesterday that it intercepted a "hostile aircraft" and two projectiles that crossed into Israeli territory from Lebanon.

Hezbollah, for its part, said that "in response to the Israeli enemy army's violation of the ceasefire", its fighters targeted soldiers in northern Israel with a rocket barrage.

A truce to halt the fighting in Lebanon was meant to take hold on April 17, but has never been observed, with both sides justifying their ongoing attacks by the other's alleged violations.

Senior Hezbollah official Mahmud Qomati had told AFP on Tuesday that the group would "not accept a partial ceasefire".

Despite the ongoing fighting, Israeli and Lebanese diplomats were to hold a second day of direct talks in Washington.

They are part of a fourth round of talks since the fighting erupted on March 2, when Hezbollah entered the Middle East war on the side of its backer Iran with rocket fire at Israel.

Hezbollah is sharply opposed to the direct negotiations.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said he hoped the negotiations would produce "an action plan".

Speaking ahead of the talks, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told US broadcaster CNBC that he and Trump shared the goal "to disarm Hezbollah and... to demilitarise Lebanon".

He said the group "puts all the citizens of Lebanon at gunpoint and uses Lebanon as a platform to launch terror missiles into our cities".

Paramedics

Among the Israeli strikes yesterday was one targeting a car on the main highway out of the capital, Lebanon's state-run National News Agency (NNA) said.

The NNA also reported strikes on more than 20

locations in the south, some after Israel's military warned residents of several villages to evacuate.

The health ministry said an Israeli attack on Al-Hawsh near the city of Tyre killed four Syrians and two Palestinians.

But an Israeli military spokesperson told AFP's Jerusalem bureau that "we are not aware of any such attack having occurred in the area".

The Lebanese health ministry said an Israeli strike elsewhere in the south targeted an ambulance, killing two paramedics from the Risala Scouts Association, which is affiliated with Hezbollah's ally the Amal movement.

The ministry circulated images of a badly damaged ambulance, with medical masks spilling out of the vehicle and scattered on the road.

At least 130 emergency and health workers have been killed since the fighting began.

Lebanon's army said a soldier was also killed in an Israeli strike, while an officer and a soldier were wounded in a separate attack on a military vehicle.

The force denounced what it called Israel's "deliberate targeting of army personnel, vehicles and positions".

Petition

On Tuesday, Israel's military alleged that Hezbollah members were operating in Tyre's Christian quarter and said it would warn people to leave should the group remain there.

An AFP correspondent said the situation in Tyre was relatively calm yesterday morning, adding that some people who had been sleeping in cars or tents at the edge of the Christian quarter left for other parts of the city.

A petition calling for Tyre to be declared an "open city" free of any armed presence and urging Lebanon's military to deploy there has garnered more than 180 signatures, including local lawyers and intellectuals.

Hezbollah has a strong presence in Tyre, and some signatories have since been attacked on social media for their stance.

More than 200 people have signed a similar petition concerning Nabatieh, another large south Lebanon city that has come under Israeli attack.

Israel has recently escalated its attacks and is staging its deepest ground offensive into Lebanon in two decades.

Tehran has insisted that any deal to end the wider Middle East war include Lebanon, saying this week that Israel's expanding campaign there threatened a separate weeks-long US-Iran ceasefire in the Gulf. — AFP

Netanyahu downplays row with Trump, says both agree on disarming Hezbollah

JERUSALEM – Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu downplayed yesterday a row with US President Donald Trump, saying they both were aligned on the goal of disarming Hezbollah in order to achieve peace between Israel and Lebanon.

Trump confirmed in an interview published on Wednesday in the *New York Post* that he had a tense exchange with Netanyahu two days prior, in which he reportedly berated his close ally with expletives.

Netanyahu downplayed the dispute in an interview with US television channel CNBC, saying he and Trump were on the same page when it came to tackling Lebanese militant group Hezbollah.

Hezbollah "is an Iranian proxy that puts all the citizens of Lebanon at gunpoint and uses Lebanon as a platform to launch terror missiles into our cities, to launch killer drones against our civilians", Netanyahu said in the interview.

"And so if we want to save Lebanon, if we want to get a Lebanese-Israeli peace, as I do, we have to disarm Hezbollah and we have to demilitarise Lebanon. And I know that this is a goal that the president and I share, and that's what we have to do."

Trump had said he was "perturbed" by the situation in Lebanon when he spoke to Netanyahu on Monday.

"You said, 'Are you f-ing crazy? What are you f-ing doing? I helped you stay out of jail.' Is that true? Did you speak to him in those terms?" the *New York Post* interviewer asked.

"I did," Trump responded. "I was a little bit perturbed at his constantly fighting with Lebanon."

"I said, 'Bibi, we gotta stop this.'"

Trump went on to say he had a "very good relationship" with Netanyahu. "We've done well together... I like Bibi a lot."

Netanyahu told his CNBC interviewer that he and Trump had always "found a way" to move forward, declining to elaborate on the details of their conversation.

"We have so many agreements, we agree on the main things," he said.

"You have these tactical disagreements. We always find a way to work them out, and we do so as great friends. We can disagree in the morning, and by the afternoon, we have common action," he said.

When asked whether his relationship with Trump had changed, Netanyahu said: "No".

"This has been a great relationship, because he's been the greatest friend that Israel has ever had in the White House," he said.

"He respects me. I respect him. We always find a way to work out our differences." — AFP

UK urged to end contract with US AI-firm Palantir

LONDON – British lawmakers called yesterday for the government to end a contract between the country's National Health Service and AI giant Palantir, warning of an over-reliance on US data providers.

"Palantir's increasing presence across the public sector represents an unacceptable point of weakness," the parliamentary Commons Science, Innovation and Technology committee said in a report.

Their conclusions were "not ideologically motivated or driven by concerns about the quality of their products," it added.

But "reliance on a small number of US-based providers represents a clear vulnerability" which could leave public services "at the mercy of foreign actors," the report said.

Palantir was co-founded by Peter Thiel, a right-wing Silicon Valley billionaire close to US President Donald Trump, with support from America's CIA overseas spying service.

It has notably worked with the US government to identify undocumented immigrants or targets in the US-Israel war on Iran.

Campaign groups have warned the company's products pose risks related to mass surveillance, infringements on individual freedoms and data protection.

In recent years, Palantir has pushed to further penetrate the European market.

The British MPs called on the government to use a break clause next year to end the £330-million (US\$443 million) contract signed in 2023.

"The UK can and should be aiming for technology sovereignty in critical parts of our public sector and supporting domestic alternatives through smarter procurement," committee chairwoman

Chi Onwurah said.

The committee proposed that the government should either look for an alternative UK provider or develop its own in-house system.

The NHS says on its website that the contract contains multiple measures "to mitigate the risk of lock-in to the supplier".

Palantir's UK head, Louis Mosley, said: "The committee has decided to put the politics of the playground before public services, arguing for the rejection of technology that is proven to deliver more NHS operations, less crime and better military capability."

According to the *Guardian* daily, committee member Martin Wrigley said US authorities could evoke a US law to force a tech company to disclose information.

This could apply to a Palantir deal with the UK's financial crime-busting watchdog, the Financial Conduct Authority, which is under trial, Wrigley said.

But Palantir denied the report, saying due to tight encryption "it is not technically possible for Palantir to respond to such a request without the FCA's direct involvement".

Meanwhile, a spokesman for the London mayor's office told AFP that a two-year, £50-million contract with Palantir to work with the Metropolitan police had been blocked.

"The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) were not satisfied that the process followed by the Met adequately ensured or demonstrated value for money," the spokesman said.

The Met police said it regretted the decision as Palantir's "technology has shown it can save much more than it costs and that it can improve performance."

— AFP

US services activity heats up in May, beating expectations: survey

WASHINGTON – Activity in the US services sector expanded in May, according to survey data released yesterday, beating expectations and continuing to show strong performance despite respondents citing rising cost pressures.

The Institute for Supply Management's (ISM) services index came in at 54.5 percent last month, up 0.9 percentage points from April's figure.

The reading beat expectations, with economists polled by Dow Jones Newswires and the Wall Street Journal expecting 53.9, and Briefing.com predicting 53.8.

Indexes for business activity and new orders also remained in expansion territory – making gains from the month before – but the employment index contracted for the third month in a row.

Input prices – pushed by US President Donald Trump's tariffs and inflation fuelled by his war on Iran – remained high, with the prices index increasing by 0.6 percentage points from April's figure to 71.3 percent.

This was its highest reading since August 2022, when prices were on their way down after hitting a peak in the pandemic.

"The [prices] index has exceeded 60 percent for 18 straight months, increasing its 12-month average from 67.7 percent to 68 percent," said Steve Miller, chair of the ISM's Services Business Survey Committee.

"Diesel, gasoline, oil and related commodities were once again most frequently mentioned as up in price in May."

The US-Israel war on Iran has sent global energy prices surging, as Tehran's retaliatory action has virtually blocked the vital Strait of Hormuz through which roughly a fifth of global oil and gas supplies normally pass.

Activity was up across a broad swath of industries, with some of the largest gains reported in wholesale trade; arts, entertainment and recreation; construction; information; and agriculture.

The only industry that reported a contraction in May was real estate, rental and leasing.

"Patient volumes and activity remain high, employment is steady and supply chains are operating effectively," said one respondent in the health care industry, which has seen robust growth as the US population ages.

"There are some product lines on allocation as a direct result of the Middle East conflict; however, the current state is manageable."

For others, the effects of the war were more acute.

"We are seeing the dual effects of the administration's tariff policy dynamics and the conflict in the Persian Gulf affect our pricing," said one respondent in the accommodation and food services industry.

– AFP

Kenya health minister says US Ebola quarantine centre will proceed

NAIROBI – Kenya's health minister said yesterday that the US-funded quarantine centre would proceed, days after deadly protests erupted over the project.

The US-built facility at Kenya's Laikipia Air Base was due to open last week, according to US officials, to quarantine Americans arriving from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which is battling a major Ebola outbreak.

But it has been temporarily blocked by a court order, and triggered protests on Monday that killed two people, according to a rights group.

Speaking in parliament, health minister Aden Duale said the centre would serve both Kenyans and US nationals, dismissing fears it would be "exclusive".

"Quarantine is not only for Americans. Even Kenyans will be isolated at the facility," Duale said.

"Laikipia airbase is one of the 23 quarantine isolation centres we

are building. And we will not stop it," he added.

Kenyans are angry their territory is being used by a foreign power in a way that has colonial undertones, and over the risk of Ebola spreading.

Kenya has recorded no cases of Ebola despite widespread testing of arrivals but neighbouring Uganda has registered 15 cases including one death.

The centre – about 200 kilometres from the capital Nairobi – was set to have 50 isolation beds and be managed by US medical staff.

In his address, Duale said the government "will not consult citizens" on the establishment of the Ebola facilities.

"This epidemic does not require any consultation... We are dealing with a very abnormal situation," he said.

The minister said the centre comes under a 2015 agreement with the US, part of its Biological Threat Reduction Program.

– AFP

Hundreds flee as S Africa anti-migrant mobs go door-to-door



Immigrants carrying their belongings walk on a street in Stanford, about 120 km from Cape Town, on Tuesday, after saying that they were threatened in the communities in which they live. A rising tide in anti-immigrant sentiment, including protest marches and even violent attacks has been taking place in various places around South Africa. – AFP

Shakirah Thebus

GANSBAAI, South Africa – Hundreds of foreigners fearing for their lives have taken shelter in community halls on South Africa's south coast, saying mobs of locals were going door-to-door telling them to leave the country.

Mostly nationals of Malawi and Mozambique, many told AFP they had fled their homes at the weekend and spent nights in the mountains and bush, before making their way to the small-town community centres.

"They said 'you are a foreigner, you don't belong in South Africa, so you must go'," Mozambican Thomas Vincent Baloyi told AFP in Gansbaai, around 110 kilometres southeast of Cape Town.

"I said, 'no, I got documents to be here in South Africa'. They didn't want to know," said Baloyi, who has been in the country for nearly 16 years working in construction and gardening.

"They just chased us away like dogs... that is unfair because, actually, I'm a human being," the 32-year-old said. "We just stayed in the bush until six in the morning."

Weeks of mostly small protests across South Africa against illegal foreign nationals exploded into violence at the weekend in the town of Mossel Bay, 250 kilometres up the coast, where 55 shacks were torched.

The South African police said two people from Mozambique were killed "during activities associated with antiforeigner demonstrations".

They rejected a statement by the Mozambique government that five of its citizens were killed as a "direct consequence of the xenophobic attacks".

Mozambique also said around 300 of its citizens fled back across the border on Saturday and hundreds more would follow.

The deaths are the first linked to a new wave of anti-migrant protests by fringe groups that accuse undocumented foreign nationals of crime and taking scarce jobs and resources away from locals.

After one anti-illegal migrant group set a June 30 deadline for undocumented migrants to go home, small bands of people brandishing whips, sticks, wooden clubs and sometimes axes are reported to have taken to the streets in various places to reinforce the ultimatum.

Ghana has already flown home 300 of its citizens, with hundreds more due to leave this weekend, and Nigeria has also announced emergency repatriation flights.

'Dragged out'

"They were dragging people out of their houses... whether you are legal or illegal, they say they don't want any foreign nationals in the township," local councillor Msa Nomatiti told AFP.

Locals turned on foreigners in an informal settlement in Gansbaai on Monday, he said, alleging some of the groups going door-to-door to search for foreign nationals were accompanied by the police.

More than 500 people had fled their homes on Monday, he said.

By late Tuesday, small groups could still be seen walking out of informal settlements in the area, hauling their belongings in the dark night and soft rain as they made their way to places of safety.

"Some of them lost their

passports because of the beatings and being dragged out of their houses," Nomatiti said. Government officials were sent to help with documentation and voluntary repatriations.

Around 50 people huddled over large buckets of food at the tiny Gansbaai mosque, which was crammed with people and belongings, sharing one toilet and a single tap.

'Better to go home alive'

In the small coastal town of Kleinmond, 40 kilometres closer to Cape Town, nearly 100 foreigners, most of them Malawian, sought shelter at a local community hall.

Large bags of clothing and blankets lined the walls and chairs were the only furniture. Volunteers served warm meals and donations from local residents trickled in.

Landlords told non-South Africans on Saturday to leave immediately as locals were going door-to-door in search of foreign nationals, Malawian Michael Markson told AFP.

"So we came out in the night hours, we went to the bush. There's a mountain up there, we slept there," said the 31-year-old, his eyes bloodshot.

"They're taking pangas... dangerous tools. They can hunt someone," he said.

In the town of Standford less than 20 kilometres inland, another Malawian national, Talibo Mbeve, said he had been sheltering at the community hall for two days.

"The thieves, they have already taken all our stuff at home, so we don't have anything. But it's better to go home without anything than to lose our lives," he said. – AFP

Germany fails to gain seat on UN Security Council

UNITED NATION, New York – Germany failed yesterday for the first time to secure a seat on the UN Security Council, with Portugal and Austria receiving more votes for the two Western European spots

starting in 2027.

The UN Security Council has 15 members: five permanent (the United States, Russia, China, France, and the United Kingdom) and 10 elected for staggered two-year terms, with seats

allocated for different world regions.

In secret ballots cast by the General Assembly for the European seats, Portugal and Austria received 134 and 131 votes respectively, while Germany received 104. – AFP

Portugal hit by general strike over labour reforms

LISBON – Public transport and municipal services were severely disrupted in Portugal yesterday due to a 24-hour general strike over proposed labour reforms.

The stoppage hit transport companies as well as waste collection, hospitals and schools, according to the General Confederation of Portuguese Workers (CGTP).

In Lisbon, all metro stations were closed but some buses were still running. At Santa Apolónia railway station, in the city centre, display boards showed a long list of cancelled trains.

“I’m waiting for the bus because I usually take the metro but I’m already late,” Daniel Barros, a 54-year-old construction worker, told AFP.

At airports, the strike led to the cancellation of some 330 out of about 500 scheduled flights.

“The time has come to bring down the labour code reform. What’s on the table is very bad for workers,” said the CGTP Secretary General Tiago Oliveira on Tuesday.

Oliveira said the plan would lead to “the entrenchment of job insecurity”, “the deregulation of working hours” and “easier dismissals”.



Travellers check their phones at Lisbon’s empty Santa Apolónia train station during yesterday’s nationwide general strike. – AFP

Last December, unions organised the first general strike in Portugal in 12 years, also to protest against the reform.

That movement was supported by the more moderate Workers’ General Union (UGT), which did not join yesterday’s action.

Prime Minister Luis Montenegro’s right-wing government negotiated for months with employers’ representatives and the UGT to try to reach an agreement on its proposal.

But the talks ultimately broke down.

In the meantime, the cabinet submitted to parliament a slightly amended version of the reform unveiled last summer.

As it lacks a majority, the government must now try to secure the backing of either the opposition Socialist Party (PS) or the far right, both of which have already expressed strong reluctance. – AFP

Angola eyes stronger connectivity with Asia through new route to Guangzhou

LUANDA – Angola’s newly launched air route linking its northwestern province of Icolo e Bengo and the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou will enhance connectivity between Africa and Asia, Transport Minister Ricardo D’Abreu has said.

Speaking at the launch ceremony on Tuesday, he noted that the new route forms part of the government’s strategy to expand Angola’s international connectivity, attract investment and promote economic diversification.

D’Abreu described Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong Province, as one of the world’s largest industrial, commercial and logistics centers and a strategic hub in global

supply chains.

According to the minister, the connection will bring Africa closer to Asia, create new opportunities for transit and regional interconnection, and represent a concrete step toward deepening relations between Angola and China.

The minister noted that Angola-China cooperation is entering a new phase, expanding beyond infrastructure financing to include productive investment, logistics, technology, industrialization, value chains and business mobility.

Angola’s national carrier TAAG will initially operate the route once a week.

TAAG Chief Executive Officer Clovis Rosa said the service is expected to benefit business travelers, logistics operators, students, professionals and tourists while creating new opportunities for air cargo transport and supporting supply chains.

Rosa said the route’s broader significance lies in its potential to strengthen Angola’s position as a hub between Africa and Asia.

“We want passengers from multiple African markets to use the TAAG network and Dr. António Agostinho Neto International Airport to access the Asian continent more quickly, efficiently and competitively,” he said. – Xinhua

Mozambique extends livestock vaccination campaign amid import delays

MAPUTO – Mozambique has extended a nationwide livestock vaccination campaign until mid-July after delays in imported vaccine supplies, while stepping up efforts to revive domestic vaccine production amid growing concerns over animal disease outbreaks and food security.

Speaking at the opening of the National Animal Health Meeting in Maputo on Monday, Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Roberto Albino said disruptions in international vaccine deliveries had prevented the campaign from being completed by the end of May as originally planned.

“Thus, the vaccination period is being extended until July 15, 2026, to ensure that no cattle are left unvaccinated because of the logistical delays we are facing,” Albino said.

The minister noted that Mozambique is vaccinating 2.4

million cattle against anthrax and foot-and-mouth disease, one million against blackleg, and 1.3 million against lumpy skin disease. Additional campaigns targeting Newcastle disease in poultry and rabies are also underway.

According to Albino, the government and its development partners have mobilized about 600 million meticais (US\$9.39 million) to finance the bovine vaccination campaign.

Vaccine shortages affecting several African countries exposed the need for greater self-reliance in animal health systems, he said, adding that Mozambique plans to invest in reviving local vaccine production through the country’s agricultural research institute.

The minister said that animal health is critical for economic growth, food security and public health, noting that the livestock

subsector recorded an estimated growth rate of 4.5 percent.

Representing the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, Claudia Pereira reaffirmed the agency’s support for Mozambique’s efforts to strengthen veterinary services and disease prevention systems.

“Investing in animal health is simultaneously investing in economic development, food security and the well-being of populations,” Pereira said.

The meeting, held under the theme “Strengthening Animal Health to Guarantee Public Health and Food Security,” brought together government officials, veterinary professionals, researchers, development partners and livestock producers to discuss strategies for improving veterinary services, disease surveillance and biosafety systems. – Xinhua

Spanish hotel chain Melia shutter operations at 15 Cuba hotels

MADRID – Spain’s largest hotel chain Melia said yesterday that it would cease operating 15 hotels in Cuba, joining other foreign firms that have cut ties with the island’s military conglomerate GAESA under pressure from Washington.

The company cited geopolitical, social, legal and economic circumstances in Cuba for its decision to withdraw from the 15 hotels it manages in the country with GAESA. Melia, one of the largest foreign hotel operators in Cuba, did not refer to the other 19 hotels it operates in Cuba in partnership with the Tourism Ministry.

“The decision has been taken from a deep sense of corporate responsibility and is the result of a combination of circumstances beyond the company’s capacity to manage or influence,” the company said in a statement.

Melia follows Spanish hotel chain Iberostar and Canada’s Blue Diamond, both of which recently announced plans to halt tourism operations in Cuba as the island’s tourism sector struggles under pressure from Washington.

It said the financial impact of its decision would be limited because the “vast majority” of the 15 hotels were currently closed due to power shortages and a drop in tourist numbers.

Melia and Iberostar were among the first Spanish hotel groups to establish a presence in Cuba after

the Caribbean nation opened its tourism sector to foreigners in the 1990s, hoping to ease the economic crisis triggered by the collapse of the Soviet Union.

As US President Donald Trump openly muses about seizing control of the island, his administration has targeted GAESA, a major player in the Cuban economy.

An executive order issued on May 1 froze the conglomerate’s US assets and penalised foreign companies that work with it.

These companies have until tomorrow to modify their activities, according to the US Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC).

If not, sanctioned companies could have their assets frozen or encounter difficulties in accessing the international financial system.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, a Cuban American, recently accused Cuban leaders of corruption and theft through GAESA.

Cuba’s economic crisis has escalated since January, when the United States conducted a military raid that removed leftist leader Nicolás Maduro from power in Venezuela.

Without Caracas as a source of oil, Cuba has struggled to keep electricity on and food and medicine in stock.

In response, several countries, including Canada, have issued travel advisories and major airlines including Spain’s Iberia have cut service to the country. – AFP



A tricycle passes in front of the Gran Hotel Bristol in Havana yesterday. The Spanish hotel group Melia has stopped managing 15 hotels in Cuba that it operated in partnership with the Gaesa conglomerate, which is linked to the army and subject to United States sanctions. – AFP

Mozambique to repatriate 1,000 citizens after attacks on foreign nationals in South Africa

MAPUTO – Mozambique plans to repatriate nearly 1,000 citizens from South Africa following a recent wave of attacks targeting foreign nationals, according to authorities.

Speaking on Tuesday after a meeting of the Council of Ministers in Maputo, Minister of Health Ussene Hilário Isse said nine Mozambican nationals had lost their lives in the violence and related incidents.

“Five were killed in the attacks, two were hit by cars as they attempted to escape, and two others died in a car crash,” Isse said, adding that the government

is working closely with South African authorities to assist affected Mozambican citizens and facilitate their return home.

According to the Mozambican government, the attacks have affected about 884 Mozambican citizens, with more than 300 having returned to Mozambique voluntarily over the weekend.

Mozambicans arriving at border posts are being provided with food and other support until they reach their final destinations, mainly in the southern provinces of Maputo, Gaza and Inhambane. – Xinhua

Scotland's Tartan Army to bring 'the party' on World Cup return

Kieran Canning



GLASGOW – “No Scotland, no party” is a popular refrain of the Tartan Army and for the first time in 28 years the World Cup will be treated to the Scottish fans’ vibrant blend of noise, colour and passion.

Scotland supporters are more famous for making an impression on major tournaments than their team on the pitch.

The nation has never made it out of the group stage at World Cups and European Championships in 12 previous attempts.

Yet around 200,000 Scots earned rave reviews for the atmosphere they brought to Euro 2024 in Germany despite failing to see their side win a match.

Tens of thousands are expected to defy exorbitant prices to make the trek to Boston and Miami in the coming weeks.

“If you would have told me 28 years ago that we wouldn’t see another World Cup until now I would’ve burst into tears to be honest,” Niall Fitzgerald, 50, told AFP outside Hampden Park, which hosted Scotland’s friendly win against Curacao last weekend.

“But now that I’m going I can barely believe it.

“Every day I think about nothing else. I’m beyond excited,” added the Scotsman, dressed in a kilt and Stetson cowboy hat.

Scotland’s presence on the world stage for the first time since the 1998 tournament in France was sealed with a memorable 4-2 win over Denmark.

Underlining the significance of Scotland’s World Cup return, Scott McTominay’s overhead kick in that dramatic victory has been commemorated in a giant mural outside Hampden, and on a limited edition £20 (US\$26) bank note.

Haunted by the ghosts of previous World Cup flops, Scotland’s tournament opener against Caribbean minnows Haiti offers hope that the travelling hordes will be able to celebrate a winning start to the campaign.

But much tougher tests lie in wait, against 2022 semi-finalists Morocco and five-time winners Brazil.

“I think they’ll probably bring a lot of drinking, partying. I think they’ll be some of the best fans there,” supporter Ivor Much said of Scotland’s flair for creating a carnival atmosphere.

“I think it’s a perfect match to have Brazil and Scotland together.”

‘Stolen from the poor’

The joy of qualification, though, has been tempered by the exorbitant prices of tickets, travel and accommodation.

Scotland boss Steve Clarke urged supporters not to rack up huge debts in their desire to follow Scotland in North America.

Category-one tickets for their clash with Brazil were priced at US\$700, with fees well into the thousands quoted on the secondary market.

“The Polish fans held up a banner at one of the stadiums last year saying ‘Stolen from the poor, given to the rich’ and I think that sums it up,” said fan Steven Webster, who has not missed a Scotland home game since the coronavirus lockdown.

The 49-year-old is instead among many planning on making the trip to the south of Spain to watch games in bars and take in a party atmosphere, even if it is several thousand miles from the heart of the action.

“The cost of going to America for the games, we could have bought a brand new car for the same sort of money,” said Webster.

“Instead we’re going to Spain. I am getting a bit of FOMO (fear of missing out) right now.”

Yet for those fortunate to follow their heroes across the Atlantic in the coming weeks, the party is just getting started.

“Everybody has got their hand out in this World Cup and it’s been a bit of a shame. But that said nothing would deter us from being there, whatever the cost,” said Fitzgerald.

“Everybody loves the Tartan Army. Even if they’ve never met the Tartan Army, they never want them to leave, and they want them to come back again and again.

“That’s what we are taking to the World Cup - the party!” – AFP



‘No hiding’ as Haiti thrash NZ in pre-World Cup friendly

MIAMI – Coach Darren Bazeley called it “really disappointing” as his New Zealand side suffered a demoralising 4-0 World Cup warm-up defeat to fellow qualifiers Haiti on Tuesday, in a match delayed by lightning in Florida.

It was New Zealand’s heaviest loss in nine years and a rude awakening with a friendly against England next and the World Cup in North America just over a week away.

The game at Inter Miami’s stadium in Fort Lauderdale - which teed up two of the lowest-ranked teams at the World Cup - started 30 minutes late because of the weather.

When it did begin, Haiti took the lead after 12 minutes through Ruben Providence.

The 32-year-old New Zealand

defender Tim Payne, who has become an unlikely social media star, was among a raft of players to come off at half-time.

With much of the crowd behind them, Haiti scored after the break through Lenny Joseph, Frantzdy Pierrot and Duke Lacroix as the New Zealand defence capitulated.

The All Whites’ best opportunity fell to captain and Nottingham Forest striker Chris Wood, who had a bicycle kick saved on the line in his 89th game for his country, a New Zealand record.

“My analyst has already told me that stats for possession, shots and chances were pretty similar (to Haiti),” the Englishman Bazeley said.

“But the scoreline is 4-0 and we can’t hide behind a scoreline that’s 4-0.”

He added: “We can be better, we

definitely need to be better.

“We are at the biggest tournament in the world and we have England coming up in four days.”

New Zealand, who have yet to win a game in two previous World Cup appearances, are in Group G with Iran, Egypt and Belgium.

Haiti, returning to the World Cup for the first time since 1974, have been placed in a daunting Group C that includes Brazil, Morocco and Scotland.

Despite the poor result in humid conditions, Bazeley attempted to strike an upbeat tone with Thomas Tuchel’s England looming in another warm-up.

“On our day, when everyone performs to their best, we’re a good team,” he said.

“We have not shown that tonight and that’s really disappointing.” – AFP

Iran World Cup squad to reach Mexico early Sunday



ISTANBUL – Iran’s World Cup squad will arrive early on Sunday in Mexico where they will be based for the duration of the global football tournament, a team statement said yesterday.

“The Iran national football team will depart Antalya for Tijuana at 15:20 (local time) on Saturday, June 6, and is scheduled to arrive in Mexico at 1:30 a.m. [local time] on Sunday, June 7,” it said.

The Iran players, who have been at a training camp in the southern Turkish resort of Antalya since May 18, are still waiting for their US visas.

The 2026 World Cup, which is being

jointly hosted by the United States, Mexico and Canada, runs from June 11 to July 19.

Iran’s Team Melli has been drawn in Group G and will play New Zealand and Belgium in Los Angeles on June 15 and 21, followed by a game against Egypt in Seattle on June 26.

The US military began bombing Iran alongside Israel on February 28, sparking war, although the hostilities were halted by an April 8 ceasefire.

On Monday evening, Iran’s football federation chief Mehdi Taj said the players were expected to get their visas for Mexico either on Tuesday or

Wednesday “and then a US visa will be issued quickly”.

It was not immediately clear whether nor not they had received them.

Taj also said the team would fly to Mexico via Spain.

Tensions over the war have complicated the US visa issue, with Taj saying on May 24 that Team Melli was shifting their World Cup base from Tucson in the US state of Arizona to the northwestern Mexican border city of Tijuana.

Ahead of their departure on Saturday, Iran will play a final friendly against Mali in Antalya today, after beating Gambia 3-1 on May 29. – AFP



This image shows a detail of a national flag belonging to Mexican Alberto Obregon -inherited from his father, Fernando Obregon- signed by players of the national football team since the first FIFA World Cup held in Mexico in 1970 -a date from which he has been collecting autographs-- at his home in Cuajimalpa, Mexico City, on Tuesday. Obregon recounts that the flag which measures approximately five metres by three metres - has served as a reference point for collecting the history of the World Cups hosted in Mexico, as well as the Mexican national team’s participation in other FIFA World Cups. – AFP

Football shorts

Hojlund makes permanent move to Napoli from Man Utd

ROME – Denmark forward Rasmus Hojlund has completed a permanent move to Napoli, the Italian club announced yesterday, following his loan spell from Manchester United last season.

The 23-year-old scored 16 goals in 44 matches as Napoli finished second in Serie A, after failing to settle in two seasons in England.

Reports claim Napoli have spent 44 million euros (US\$51 million) to sign Hojlund. United paid Atalanta almost 80 million euros for him in 2023.

“SSC Napoli announce the conditions

have been met for the permanent acquisition of... Rasmus Hojlund from Manchester United,” Napoli said in a statement.

Napoli are without a coach after Antonio Conte’s departure at the end of the season. Italian media are reporting that ex-AC Milan boss Massimiliano Allegri is the frontrunner for the job.

Hojlund scored 26 goals in 95 appearances for United but struggled during the 2024-25 season after a promising debut campaign at Old Trafford.

“Everyone at the club would like to wish Rasmus all the very best for the future,” United said in a statement. – AFP

Sage to leave Ligue 1 club Lens: source

LENS – Pierre Sage is poised to step down as Lens coach, a source close to the Ligue 1 club told AFP yesterday, amid reports he is set to take over at Crystal Palace.

Sage led Lens to a second-placed finish this season behind Paris Saint-Germain and the club’s first French Cup triumph in its 120-year history.

The 47-year-old spent just one season at Lens, with his only other top-level coaching stint at Lyon.

According to French media, he could move to the Premier League to replace Oliver Glasner at Palace. – AFP

Sabalenka crumbles to French Open quarters defeat by Shnaider

Jed Court

PARIS – Aryna Sabalenka's bid for a first French Open title was left in tatters as she fell apart in a bizarre defeat by Russian 25th seed Diana Shnaider in the quarter-finals yesterday.

The world number one led by a set and a double-break before exiting the tournament in a blaze of unforced errors, collapsing to a 3-6, 7-5, 6-0 loss in blustery conditions on Court Philippe Chatrier.

"I feel like when I saw her (Sabalenka) being emotional, I was, like, 'Yes, like, you are in the right direction, you've got to stay, just focus on yourself, don't focus too much on her, what she's talking to her team or whatever she's doing'," said Shnaider after beating a top-10 player for only the second time in her career.

Shnaider will face Polish qualifier Maja Chwalinska in the semi-finals today, with Marta Kostyuk or Mirra Andreeva awaiting the winner in Sunday's final.

"She's a very tricky player, so I'm not surprised that she's good. Sometimes, it just takes time," said the 22-year-old Shnaider of Chwalinska, who she beat at a lower-tier event in Istanbul four years ago.

Sabalenka was the only Grand Slam champion left in either the men's or women's singles draws at Roland Garros, but belied that status by making a whopping 57 unforced errors.

"You know those rooms where you just go in and you smash everything?" smiled



Diana Shnaider plays a forehand return to Aryna Sabalenka during their quarter finals match at the French Open tennis tournament on Court Philippe-Chatrier at the Roland-Garros Complex in Paris yesterday. – AFP

Sabalenka when asked how she would get over the defeat.

"Probably I will spend a whole day tomorrow [today] over there destroying stuff. Maybe it will help, maybe not."

Shnaider was playing in her first major quarter-final, but now finds herself a strong favourite to reach the final heading into her last-four tie against world number 114 and fellow left-hander Chwalinska.

"Definitely a special tournament for me here," added the Russian.

"It's going to be a lefty battle so I'm looking forward (to the semi-final)."

Sabalenka's scarcely believable defeat

was reminiscent of the way she threw away a strong position in last year's final against Coco Gauff.

"I knew the final, last year, I watched it. I knew that it was also super windy," said Shnaider.

"So of course I had that thought in the back of my mind that she was struggling with Coco last year. I was, like, 'Yeah, I've got to use this opportunity, I need to just adjust and do my best'."

Belarusian Sabalenka was playing in a 14th consecutive Grand Slam quarter-final but failed to become the first woman to make seven straight major semis since Serena Williams.

Increasingly frustrated Sabalenka

The top seed raced into a 5-1 lead and eventually sealed the opener on her third set point after initially failing to serve it out.

The second set followed a similar pattern at first, as Sabalenka moved 4-1 in front with a double-break before throwing away her next service game.

Sabalenka became increasingly frustrated as she gifted Shnaider three break points to level at 4-4.

After some animated remonstrating with her box, she recomposed herself enough to hold.

But the 28-year-old's game continued to come apart, as a string of dreadful unforced errors allowed Shnaider to break again and tie up the set at 5-5, with Sabalenka left to gesticulate wildly towards her coaching staff.

Shnaider could not believe her luck as Sabalenka dumped successive forehands into the bottom of the net to finish off the set and send the match into a decider.

The Russian grew in confidence and moved 2-0 up in the third as Sabalenka sprayed eight unforced errors around Chatrier in the space of two games.

Shnaider cruised to victory from there, fittingly securing a semi-final berth when Sabalenka knocked a routine backhand into the net on the third match point.

A stunned world number one was left to trudge off court after winning just 14 points in the deciding set. – AFP

Stokes defends Archer's England absence due to IPL duties

Cricket

LONDON – England captain Ben Stokes has warned leading players such as Jofra Archer could be driven away from international cricket if England attempt to limit their Indian Premier League commitments.

Several months after their embarrassing 4-1 Ashes series loss in Australia, England return to Test cricket against New Zealand at Lord's today.

But they will be without pace spearhead Archer, a member of the Rajasthan Royals team beaten by Gujarat Titans in the IPL last Friday.

The 31-year-old is now in Barbados, the country of his birth, and his availability even for the second Test at the Oval remains uncertain.

Archer has a lucrative England central contract and has been supported by the England and Wales Cricket Board through five years of injury trouble.

Former New Zealand paceman Simon Doull said it was "absolutely ludicrous" that Archer would be absent from the series opener.

But Stokes told reporters at Lord's yesterday that top white-ball players could be lost to Test cricket if they had to make themselves available for every match.

"I totally understand people's frustrations around it, but there is another side to it," he said.

"A lot of it has to do with the landscape of cricket and where it is at the moment.

"A lot of points people are making around Jof and that situation are to do with the landscape when they were playing.

"But it's completely different now. There are opportunities for cricketers now that there were not 10, 15, 20 years ago."

Stokes said Archer's desire to play for his country was unquestionable, warning against a hardline approach.

"There is a situation where it could get messy and players like Jofra might not play for England again if you handle it in a different way, and that is not good for there anyone," he said.

"Jofra has shown that he's committed and loves playing for England. Just because he's not available for this first Test match does not change that."

Jacob Bethell represented Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the 20-over IPL but is in the England team at Lord's, the first of a three-Test series.

The batter has played no meaningful red-ball cricket since his stunning Ashes century in Sydney in January.

"It's just one of those things. You have your number three (Bethell), he has a great couple of games out in Australia, then he spends nine or 10 weeks out in India and you are seeing him two days before a Test match," said Stokes.

"That is almost becoming the norm. The game is changing all the time. There are some things you have to roll with and accept, it is what it is."

– AFP

McIlroy chasing elusive Memorial, Scheffler eyes 3-peat

Golf

LOS ANGELES – Rory McIlroy is targeting a first ever victory at the PGA Tour's Memorial Tournament today as he returns to action in his final event before this month's US Open.

The Northern Ireland star, who clinched back-to-back Masters victories in April, has never won at the Jack Nicklaus-hosted tournament in Dublin, Ohio – a gap on his CV he is determined to fill.

McIlroy's best finish at Muirfield Village came a decade ago, when he finished tied for fourth in 2016.

After clinching a career Grand Slam with his maiden Masters win last year, McIlroy said yesterday the Memorial, along with Tiger Woods' annual tournament at Riviera Country Club, were now top of the list of his priorities.

"I would say here and Tiger's event at Riviera, they're the two that I would love to win," McIlroy told reporters.

"I've been lucky enough to win at Bay Hill, but not while Arnold (Palmer) was alive. So I always thought it would be cool to win here and take that little walk up the hill off the 18th green and shake Jack's hand.

"Jack and I share a nice history. We've known each other now for nearly 20 years – or I've known him for nearly 20 years. He's been nothing but great to me and my family.

"So, yeah, this is certainly one I would love to get done."

McIlroy acknowledges the challenging set-up at the par-72, 7,569 yards layout does not necessarily favour his game.

"For being such a long golf course I feel like it takes driver out of my hand a lot, which I pride myself on that being one of my biggest weapons," McIlroy said.

"The fairways pinch in right around the spots where I would be finishing driver. So it's frustrated me in a way that I feel like my biggest weapon is in some way neutralised here."

McIlroy believes success this week will hinge on tweaking his natural game.

"It's just about me being a little more disciplined and not being so aggressive with my strategy," McIlroy said.

The biggest threat to McIlroy's hopes of a first win in the tournament is likely to come from two-time defending champion Scottie Scheffler, who is chasing a rare hat-trick.

World number one Scheffler could become the first player to win the same event three years running since Steve Stricker won the John Deere Classic three times on the spin between 2009 and 2011.

"The last two years don't mean much when you stand on the first tee, but this is a golf course I've had some success at and this will be a cool place to be able to accomplish something like winning the same tournament three years in a row, especially with it being Jack's Place," Scheffler said.

"I'm looking forward to getting out there this week."

The tournament will also see a return to action for England's Aaron Rai, who is playing his first event since winning the PGA Championship last month.

Rai revealed he was still adjusting to life as a major-winner.

"It took a good few days, I think, for me to really get my head around it," Rai said of his PGA Championship victory. "I don't think I still have fully." – AFP

Virtual taekwondo to feature at 2026 Asian Games



TOKYO – Fighters wearing virtual reality headsets will battle it out in cyberspace at this year's Asian Games in Japan after organisers approved the inclusion of virtual taekwondo.

The non-contact sport sees combatants strap sensors to their bodies and aim kicks at virtual opponents in what developers call "a VR combat game that transcends physical limitations".

The Asian Games takes place in Nagoya and the wider Aichi area from September 19 to October 4.

Organisers say the inclusion of virtual taekwondo

takes the programme at the Olympic-like event to 43 sports.

It is endorsed by governing body World Taekwondo and uses motion-tracking technology in a virtual environment.

A raft of new sports have been introduced for this year's Asian Games, including racquet sport padel and teqball, which combines football and table tennis.

Esports will again feature following its runaway success at the 2023 Games in Hangzhou, where fans packed into a futuristic 4,500-seat arena to watch star gamers like South Korea's Lee "Faker" Sang-hyeok. – AFP

Indian stars push to end using elephants in Bollywood

MUMBAI – Bollywood stars are campaigning to end the use of elephants in Indian films, saying that life-size robot replicas and AI-generated images do the job without cruelty.

Top directors, producers and actors have backed the campaign by animal rights group PETA India, which this month highlighted how the rise of slick AI images provide even less reason to use real animals.

“Elephants shouldn’t suffer for our entertainment,” said A-list actor and producer John Abraham, describing why he and more than two dozen stars were supporting the campaign.

“With today’s technology, we can bring elephants to life beautifully through CGI [computer-generated imagery] and mechanical artistry, without confinement or cruelty.”

There are fewer than 50,000 Asian elephants in the wild, according to the World Wildlife Fund – the majority in India, with others in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia.

There are more than 2,600 captive elephants in India, according to environment ministry estimates. They are used for tourism, entertainment, and in temples.

PETA told AFP captive elephants are “separated from their families, kept near-constantly chained and are controlled with weapons”.

India’s Animal Welfare Board must give permission for elephants to be used in films.

The number of real elephants being used have dropped dramatically since its 2021 order that it was “advisable” that special effects or animatronics be prioritised “to prevent unnecessary pain and suffering to animals”.

‘Living free’

Now PETA campaigners are highlighting how AI-generated images, showcased in a social media campaign this month, provide increasingly lifelike images.

“Elephants are highly intelligent, emotional animals who require living free in lush jungle homes for their mental and physical wellbeing,” it said.

“In contrast, elephants used in films, shows and advertisements face extreme loneliness and severe cruelties.”

Campaigners point to the use of CGI imagery by Richie Mehta in the 2024 series “Poacher”, a Malayalam-language crime drama about ivory smuggling, and to a robotic elephant with flapping ears used in a dance routine for an advertisement by clothing company Ramraj Cotton.

Other high-profile hits who used CGI for elephants include 2020 historical action movie “Tanhaji: The Unsung Warrior” and the 2006 superhero film “Krrish”.

That compares to times past when movies, such as 1971 hit “Haathi Mere Saathi” used multiple real elephants – alongside tigers and lions – in dance scenes.

Last month, the Malayalam-language film “Kattalan” – about ivory-smuggling gangsters – featured real elephants, producers told Indian media.

Empathy

PETA has long campaigned for the end of elephants in Hindu temple ceremonies, where the animals are paraded through packed crowds with flashing lights, thumping drums and ear-splitting music.

It has donated more than 25 life-size robot elephants – made of fibreglass and rubber – to temples across India.

The models are motorised, so that they flap their ears, move tails and even spray water from rubber trunks.

In May, PETA and Shriya Saran – one of the stars of 2022 hit “RRR”, which won the Oscar for best original song – gifted one to a Hindu temple in Kanpur, in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh.

Many followers of the elephant-headed Hindu deity Ganesh see the animals as sacred, and they have traditionally played an important role in ceremonies.

Saran said the mechanical version would “allow the temple to continue age-old traditions while allowing elephants, earthly representatives of Lord Ganesha, to thrive in their natural habitats”.

Other Bollywood names, on a list of more than two dozen stars, include Richa Chadha, Farah Khan and Dia Mirza.

“Good cinema requires empathy,” said actor Pooja Bhatt. “We can tell wonderful stories on screen without exploiting animals.” – AFP

‘Backrooms’ born of ‘itch to explore’ online horror meme



US director Kane Parsons poses on the sidelines of the special screening of “Backrooms” at the Aero Theatre in Santa Monica, California on May 7, 2026. “Backrooms”, a cinema adaptation of a viral horror series on YouTube, has smashed several records during its opening weekend in the United States upon its release last Friday. – AFP

Kilian Fichou

PARIS – Bringing a horror series that went viral on YouTube to the big screen, “Backrooms” smashed box office records in its opening weekend in the US.

Ahead of the release, 20-year-old director Kane Parsons told AFP how the project developed from a creepy story that spread online about a claustrophobic, labyrinthine alternate dimension.

When did you come across the ‘Backrooms’ universe?

“It was May of 2019. I would have been 13 at the time. I do not recall the first time I saw [the original photo that inspired the stories] exactly, because it was very prevalent as a meme... I kind of saw it everywhere for a couple of weeks.

“Initially I think the thing that was speaking to me was the fact that I have certainly been in a million different spaces that resemble the backrooms and feel like the backrooms.

“The generic aspect to them is evocative of vague memories from childhood you can’t quite pin down. It wasn’t actually until probably a couple of years later [that]... I had the itch to try to explore that myself and that’s what I did with that first short.”

Your first video, posted in 2022, showed a young boy straying through terrifying corridors and topped 20 million views in two weeks. How did that affect you?

“It did very well on YouTube initially, which I did not expect... within a month of that, I started getting emails from a whole bunch of different companies.

“I had no interaction with the film industry at that point. I was 16 at the time. So it was all very new and I was very sceptical of what it could mean to try to adapt this or to be engaging with suits at all for something that I cared so personally about.

“I wanted to appreciate and be very careful with the legacy of this thing. If we’re gonna go down that road, we’ve got to do it very specifically and very meticulously.”

Why did you make the jump to cinema after making more than 20 short films on YouTube?

“My whole life I’ve used YouTube... I’ve always been of the mind that there’s not really a direct barrier other than a financial one, that separates a project that

is online from something that is in the industrial film world.

“There are reasons why internet projects are maybe not always taken seriously, but I also do think there’s a lot of genuinely really great work being done by a lot of independent creators out there.

“I’m surprised this is not a strategy being employed more, of trying to seed an IP online and test it there for cheap. That’s not a bad way to go about it. Testing this thing out and seeing if it can grow organically and take root with people in a more simple form.

“It does feel like a good majority of these projects that are kind of mentioned in the same breath are all in the horror vein. That feels like the biggest launching point for independent stuff on YouTube that I’ve seen.”

Did you always want to be the one to direct the film?

“There was no version of this where I wasn’t the one directing that I would personally be open to. I’ve always been very stingy about that.

“I would say the creative freedom got higher the further along the process went.

“The original script is probably the bit I had the least immediate [involvement in], I wasn’t writing the thing.

“From there it’s been a continuous process of sculpting it in little ways and sometimes bigger ways until it’s exactly the project that I would be wanting to put out.

“I think maybe it’s going to be weird seeing how much this has dropped into the mainstream for people [for whom] formerly this has been semi-niche.

“It’s jarring for myself as well to be seeing it on bus stops and stuff, that does not feel right for Backrooms.”

Will you continue to develop the ‘Backrooms’ universe in the cinema?

“Backrooms is not done. I know that for a fact. I am more concerned with the narrative and the specifics of how I wish to convey these arcs on an intellectual, emotional level rather than the exact containers they’ll fall into.

“I can’t see the future in terms of exactly what the most viable option will be. I wouldn’t rule out film. I wouldn’t rule out even television series. That would be my personal hope for Backrooms.” – AFP

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 14°C~24°C	Manila 25°C~31°C	New York 18°C~29°C	Lisbon 13°C~23°C
Shanghai 22°C~32°C	Bangkok 26°C~35°C	London 11°C~18°C	Rio de Janeiro 17°C~23°C
Hong Kong 25°C~32°C	Tokyo 15°C~24°C	Frankfurt 11°C~20°C	Luanda 21°C~25°C
Taipei 26°C~36°C	Singapore 25°C~33°C	Vancouver 11°C~18°C	Maputo 17°C~29°C
Guangzhou 26°C~35°C	Kuala Lumpur 25°C~35°C	Paris 10°C~19°C	Dili 20°C~31°C
Nanjing 21°C~34°C	Jakarta 24°C~33°C	Moscow 13°C~23°C	São Tomé 24°C~29°C
Guilin 22°C~31°C	Seoul 17°C~28°C	Las Vegas 24°C~40°C	Praia 20°C~29°C
Xi’an 21°C~35°C	Sydney 12°C~18°C	Monte Carlo 18°C~25°C	Bissau 23°C~34°C



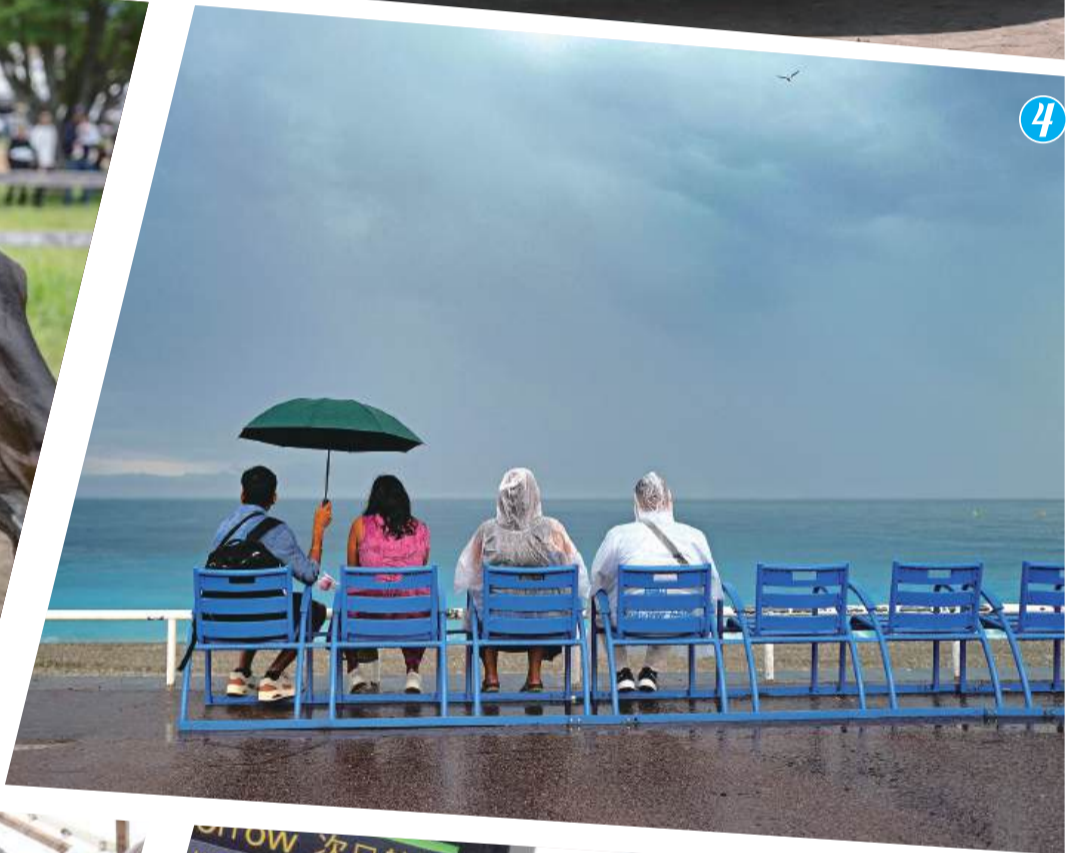
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1 Nothing is as it seems!

A man walks past the 'Upside Down House', an attraction located on the Promenade in central Blackpool, north-west England on Tuesday. — AFP

3 Still amongst us

Horsemen clad in samurai armour compete in the Kachu Keiba race during the Soma Nomaoi festival at Hibarigahara field in Minamisoma, Fukushima prefecture on May 24. The Soma Nomaoi began as a way to train mounted warriors and it still looks the same a millennium later, with riders dressed in samurai armour battling it out in riding events. — AFP

5 No marmalade?

Britain's Queen Camilla cuts a cake during a Big Lunch event at the British Library in central London, yesterday, to mark the National Year of Reading. The Big Lunch, is the UK's annual celebration bringing millions of neighbours and communities together in a nationwide act of friendship on the first weekend in June every year since 2009. The Queen has been Patron of The Big Lunch since 2013. — AFP

2 Not such a thirst quenching melon

A man seeks shade from the sun under a shelter at Marina Beach on a hot summer day in Chennai, India yesterday. — AFP

4 Enjoying the seaside

People look at the Mediterranean sea on the "Promenade des Anglais" on the French Riviera city of Nice, on Tuesday. — AFP

6 Unhappy traveller

The flight board is seen at the International Terminal at Haneda airport after flights were cancelled or severely delayed because of severe tropical storm Jangmi in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP