



Police bust prostitution ring, arresting 26, incl 3 active-duty and 2 ex-cops



Evidence, including a set of S&M (sadism and masochism) props about the case seized by Judiciary Police (PJ) officers on Thursday, is displayed at PJ headquarters in Zape, during Friday's press conference.



PJ officers escort the 26 hooded suspects to PJ vans outside the PJ headquarters on Friday. - Photos: Armino Neves

Armino Neves

The Judiciary Police (PJ) busted a prostitution ring and arrested 26 people on Thursday, including three active-duty officers of the Public Security Police (PSP) and two retired PJ officers, PJ spokesman Ho Ka Weng announced during a special press conference at PJ headquarters on Friday morning.

According to a PJ statement released after the press conference on Friday afternoon,

the 26 suspects comprise 18 local residents, six from the Chinese mainland and two from Hong Kong, aged between 39 and 68. The group includes 24 men and two women.

The statement also noted that the suspects include three PSP officers, aged between 51 and 60, surnamed Chan, Sou and Leong, and two retired male PJ officers surnamed Kam and Ieong, aged 58 and 65, respectively.

Meanwhile, the Public Prosecutions Office

(MP) announced in a statement yesterday evening that the three PSP officers involved in the case include a PSP deputy commissioner surnamed Leong, and an acting division chief surnamed Sou.

Ho revealed during Friday's press conference that the Judiciary Police received intelligence in 2019 indicating that a criminal syndicate was engaging in prostitution activities under the guise of operating saunas.

"Sauna" is a customary euphemism in

Macau for venues that offer commercial sex.

Following several years of in-depth investigation, Ho added, PJ officers discovered that three saunas were under the control of three separate criminal organisations. Ho said that the saunas offered services such as "spa treatments" and different kinds of "massage" as a cover, while they arranged for women to provide sexual services.

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A drum performance is staged at the Erdaojie tourist spot along the Grand Canal in Gucheng County, Hebei Province, on Friday. Connecting Beijing and Hangzhou in Zhejiang Province, the Grand Canal, which was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2014, is the world's longest artificial waterway. Stretching 75.1 kilometers, the Gucheng section of the Grand Canal has nourished the land along its banks for centuries and given rise to multiple provincial-level intangible cultural heritages. In recent years, Gucheng has boosted environmental conservation and cultural tourism development along the Grand Canal, transforming its banks into an ecological corridor with cultural richness. - Xinhua

Iran threatens retaliation against US, Israel after strikes on Beirut

TEHRAN – Iran threatened to retaliate against the United States and Israel for fresh strikes in Beirut yesterday, further dampening hopes for a lasting peace as the Middle East war reached its 100th day.

Efforts to turn a ceasefire into a settlement have repeatedly stalled, while the war has rattled global markets and increased domestic pressure on US President Donald Trump ahead of midterm elections.

Tehran has repeatedly insisted any deal to permanently end the war must also halt the parallel conflict in Lebanon, where Israel is pursuing a campaign against the Iran-backed movement Hezbollah.

Iran had warned in recent days that

any new attacks on Beirut would trigger a "full-scale resumption" of hostilities.

Yesterday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office announced that the army had "just struck a militant command centre in Beirut's Dahiyeh district, in response to Hezbollah's fire towards Israeli territory".

While Israel and Hezbollah routinely exchange fire near the border, Beirut's southern districts – seen as bastions of the militant group – have been struck only twice since mid-April.

Israel had warned it would hit the area should Hezbollah attack northern Israel. (More on p.10) - AFP



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Rescuers halt search for last 2 men lost in Laos cave

Rescuers called off their search Saturday for two men trapped in a semi-submerged cave in Laos for more than two weeks, as the site became unstable and survival hopes faded.

- Story on p. 8

Viral 'Cockroach Party' leads India protest over exam fiasco

Hundreds of young students gathered in New Delhi on Saturday for the first street protest organised by the satirical "Cockroach People's Party" over alleged irregularities in recent major examinations.

- Story on p. 9

Over 1.2 million people attend Pope's Mass in Madrid

More than 1.2 million people filled the streets of Madrid yesterday for Mass by Pope Leo XIV at which he called for a renewal of the Catholic faith in Spain.

- Story on p. 12

UM scholar warns AI may weaken research apprenticeship model

Khalel Vallo

A researcher from the public University of Macau (UM) has co-authored an article published in the scientific journal *Nature*, arguing that while artificial intelligence (AI) is boosting research productivity, it may also be eroding the traditional apprenticeship model that has long been central to scientific training, according to a statement by the public university on Thursday.

The article was co-written by Tony Zhang Huiquan, associate professor in the Department of Sociology at UM's Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS), and a collaborator, said the statement, which did not identify the latter.

Drawing on their experience using agentic AI* tools such as OpenClaw, the authors examine the growing impact of AI on research and education, the statement added.

Published under the title "AI agents in research: when productivity comes at the cost of apprenticeship", the article highlights concerns that junior researchers are increasingly being displaced from routine research tasks that traditionally served as key learning opportunities, the statement noted.

According to the statement, students develop research competence not only through formal instruction but also through hands-on practice under the guidance of experienced mentors. Activities such as troubleshooting errors, refining methods, calibrating instruments and making research decisions provide essential skills and judgment that cannot easily be learnt through theory alone, the statement noted, adding that the article argues that as AI systems assume more responsibilities within research workflows, students may participate less frequently in these foundational tasks.

Fewer opportunities for practical involvement, combined with reduced interaction between mentors and students, could weaken the transfer of tacit knowledge and professional experience that underpins scientific training, the statement quoted the article as saying. In order to address the issue, the authors call for a balanced approach that preserves educational goals while embracing technological



This image provided by the public University of Macau (UM) on Thursday shows the cover of the international academic journal *Nature*.

advances, the statement said, noting that they recommend integrating AI into research training, encouraging mentors and students to learn new tools together, and using AI as a shared assistant rather than a substitute for junior researchers.

The publication in *Nature* reflects UM's growing international academic profile and contributes to an increasingly important debate surrounding the role of generative** and agentic AI in higher education, the statement noted, adding that the authors argue that safeguarding apprenticeship while leveraging AI-driven productivity will be crucial to training the next generation of scientists. ■

*Agentic AI refers to artificial intelligence systems that can act autonomously to achieve specific goals, rather than just responding to direct, step-by-step prompts. Unlike traditional AI chatbots that wait for their users to ask a question and then provide an answer, agentic AI has agency. Users give it a high-level objective, and it figures out the plan, makes decisions, uses digital tools (like searching the web, sending emails, or running code), adapts to obstacles, and self-corrects along the way until the task is complete. - Gemini

**Generative AI refers to artificial intelligence systems that can create entirely new content - such as text, images, audio, video, or code - by learning the underlying patterns and structures from massive amounts of existing training data.

First community clinic starts free treatment today

Ida Cheong

The Health Bureau (SSM), in collaboration with the Macau General Union of Neighbourhood Associations (UGAMM), widely known as Kai Fong, has established the first "community clinic" at the UGAMM integrated treatment centre in Edificio do Bairro da Ilha Verde (青洲坊) in the northern district. The clinic officially begins operations today, providing residents with free diagnostic and treatment services for common acute illnesses, according to a SSM statement yesterday.

According to the statement, the clinic operates from Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., providing free care for common acute conditions such as colds and gastroenteritis, with the aim of facilitating residents' access to community medical services, effectively diverting non-scheduled outpatient services from the Health Bureau's Fai Chi Kei and Ilha Verde health centres, and further improving the accessibility of community healthcare and the overall patient experience.

Based on clinical assessment, the clinic's physicians prescribe medications uniformly provided by the Health Bureau. All consultation and prescription records will be



This undated handout photo provided by the Health Bureau (SSM) yesterday shows Macau's first community clinic, at the UGAMM (Kai Fong) integrated treatment centre in Edificio do Bairro da Ilha Verde (青洲坊) in the northern district.

fully digitised and uploaded to the Macau electronic health record platform (eHR) on the "Macao One Account" app, ensuring greater transparency, convenience, and traceability, the statement said.

The statement pointed out that in 2025, the total number of non-scheduled outpatient visits at Macau's health centres exceeded 250,000.

As the demand for acute medical services among residents continues to rise, the establishment of Macau's first community clinic offers a more convenient option for community-based acute care, thereby acting as a diversion

mechanism, which allows health centres to focus more on preventive care and chronic disease management, working alongside private medical providers to enhance the accessibility of community healthcare and improve residents' medical experience, the statement added.

The Health Bureau will closely monitor the operation of the community clinic and evaluate its effectiveness over time, aiming to lay the groundwork for potential expansion to other non-profit medical institutions in the future, the statement added. ■

Police bust prostitution ring, arresting 26, incl 3 active-duty and 2 ex-cops

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A price list displayed at the press conference capped the highest "massage" price at 8,899 patacas.

Ho noted that the price per session ranged from approximately 2,000 to 8,000 patacas, with the women involved earning between 1,000 and 2,000 patacas per session. On their price lists, the saunas listed "ratings" and "standards" based on the women's nationalities - recruited from Asia and Eastern Europe - and the kinds of service provided.

Ho also said that, in addition to the core suspects, a total of 381 people were taken to police stations for questioning during the operation.

PJ officers also seized a raft of account books, price lists, and a large quantity of sex-work paraphernalia during the raids, including pink S&M* implements displayed during the press conference.

Ho pointed out that during the investigation, the criminal syndicates demonstrated a high level of counter-surveillance awareness due to the involvement of police personnel. Whenever the implicated law enforcement officers - both those still on active duty and those already retired - received news of upcoming inspections or became aware that an investigation involved any of the three saunas, they would tip off the syndicates via secret communication methods to help conceal their criminal activities, Ho said.

In return, according to the press conference, the five current and former law enforcement officers regularly accepted bribes. The three criminal syndicates each paid bribes totalling about 150,000 to 200,000 patacas per month to the three implicated PSP officers, Ho said, adding that the two retired PJ officers each received no less than 140,000 patacas in bribes every month.

The three criminal syndicates had been operating since 2019, Ho said, adding that their total illegal proceeds are estimated to amount to 240 million, 230 million and 320 million patacas, respectively - totalling 790 million patacas.

The Judiciary Police took action on Thursday,

raiding the three saunas, five offices, and 23 other locations linked to the case. A large quantity of operational items was seized, including condoms, lubricants, account books, computers and price lists for sexual services. A total of about 50 million patacas in cash was seized.

The 26 suspects were transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) on Friday, facing charges including organised crime, bribe-taking, exploitation of prostitutes, according to the PJ press conference.

12 remanded in custody, 14 released

According to yesterday's MP statement, the 26 suspects have meanwhile been accused of organised crime involvement, money laundering and the crime of "personal favouritism practised by a civil servant" (Article 332 of the Macau Penal Code).

The statement noted 12 suspects have been remanded in custody, including the three suspects from the Public Security Police, a Hong Kong co-owner of one of the saunas, two businessmen from the Chinese mainland and a local housewife

The remaining 14 suspects were released in accordance with legally mandated coercive procedures, including the two retired PJ officers.

On Friday, the Public Security Police said in a statement that the three PSP officers allegedly involved in the case had been preventively suspended from duty and that disciplinary proceedings had been launched immediately.

Meanwhile, the Judiciary Police said in a statement on Friday that they would "not tolerate any illegal acts" by their officers, adding that heads of units had been instructed to launch a "full revision of all internal supervision and management mechanisms" in order to "identify gaps" and prevent "the occurrence of similar situations". ■

*S&M (Sadomasochism) encompasses a wide array of toys, restraints, and implements designed for consensual impact play, sensory deprivation, and bondage. These items are categorised by the sensations and experiences they are meant to create. - Gemini

Published since Aug 2004

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

Macau Weather

**CLOUDY.
SHOWERS, HEAVY AT TIMES.
OCCASIONAL THUNDERSTORMS.
FORCE 3 TO 4 SOUTH TO
SOUTHWESTERLY WINDS WITH
GUSTS.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL
RANGE BETWEEN 80%
AND 99%.**



25°C~29°C

Source: SMG

Macau's Brian Vong performs in Zhuhai



This photo provided by Brian Vong's (BV) representatives shows the Macau singer-songwriter performing at 360 Plaza by the lakeside of Zhuhai Jinwan Art Centre.

Rui Pastorin

A concert was recently held by Macau pop singer-songwriter Brian Vong (黄信斌) at 360 Plaza by the lakeside of Zhuhai Jinwan Art Centre, with the event marking the third stop in his tour across the Greater Bay Area (GBA).

Among Vong's popular songs are "25 Years Old" and "Belief+", according to a statement provided by Vong's representative. His song "Don't Give Up" and "Belief+" garnered the "Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Pop Songs Silver Prize", while the track "Believe" was selected for the National Games of China, the statement said.

During the "BV Concert 2026", which took place on May 30, the statement said, Vong performed with an "upgraded live band" and dancers while showcasing several of his Macau-inspired original songs. He and his band also performed other vocalists' Cantonese hits, prompting an encore, the statement said.

The recent concert follows shows in Macau and Hong Kong. Vong plans for the next concert to be in the Guangdong Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin.

Vong is a China Conservatory of Music Grade 8 Certificate in Vocal Music and a CAA (China Art Association) Grade 10 Certificate in Vocal Music. Aside from performing, Vong acts as a jury member or artistic advisor for competitions in music events around GBA cities. ■

First EV supercharging station to open after this month's testing

Ida Cheong

Environmental Protection Bureau (DSPA) Director Ip Kuong Lam told reporters during a launch ceremony on Saturday that the construction and equipment installation of Macau's first supercharging station for electric vehicles (EVs), located on Rua da Patinagem (溜冰路) in Cotai, have been completed and the gradual trial operation will follow after commissioning.

Ip made the remarks during the "Main National Event for World Environment Day on June 5, 2026 (Macau)" rollout ceremony and the "All-People Energy Saving and Carbon Reduction" action kickoff ceremony at the Complex of Commerce and Trade Cooperation Platform for China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (aka Forum Macao Complex) in Nam Van.

Meanwhile, the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) government plans to increase the number of fast chargers by about 20 percent this year, and charging points for electric scooters will be added in more than 50 public carparks this year, raising the total from over 800 to about 1,400 – an increase of about 45 percent, Ip said.

Ip added that his bureau will cooperate with power utility CEM to optimise the charging stations app, aiming to provide real-time charging station availability and state of charge of electric vehicles (EVs).



Environmental Protection Bureau (DSPA) Director Ip Kuong Lam speaks to reporters on the sidelines of the "Main National Event for World Environment Day on June 5, 2026 (Macau)" kickoff ceremony and the "All-People Energy Saving and Carbon Reduction" action launch ceremony at the Complex of Commerce and Trade Cooperation Platform for China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (aka Forum Macao Complex) in Nam Van on Saturday.

– Photo: Ida Cheong

Since the MSAR government launched its long-term carbon reduction strategy and electric vehicle promotion plan in 2023, after two and a half years of implementation, local carbon emissions have been effectively brought under control, Ip said, adding that land transportation has taken the lead in achieving carbon peaking, while various initiatives such as low-carbon electricity, clean energy substitution, and environmental protection publicity

have been steadily implemented.

Ip noted in a speech that electricity supply and land transportation are Macau's two main sources of carbon emissions. In line with its policy agenda, the MSAR government is working to increase the share of clean electricity in imported power, he said, adding that under this year's policy plan, the proportion of clean energy in purchased electricity will be raised to 50 percent, with a long-term goal of achieving carbon neutrality in imported electricity by 2050.

June 5 Main National Event for World Environment Day

Ip addressed the kickoff ceremony on Saturday saying that in response to World Environment Day on June 5, under the guidance of the Ministry of Ecology and Environment, Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau have jointly organised the "June 5 Main National Event for World Environment Day" and the "Beautiful China Promotion Week" for the first time this year.

For this year's event, themed "Comprehensive Green Transition, Building a Beautiful China Together"; a raft of activities are being held, including environmental protection colouring and creative painting competition, public guided tours of eco-facilities, and "lights off for one hour" which was held on Friday. ■

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RUA DAS ESTALAGENS

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激活片區新動能

創業方案大募集2.0

Entrepreneurship Recruitment Programme 2.0
Fostering entrepreneurship on Rua das Estalagens,
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承先啟後 | 賦能店舖煥新升級
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ABOUT The Young Post

The Macau Post Daily's The Young Post will be published every Monday to present and discuss topical issues that may interest not only the younger but also all the other generations.

Hou Kong's exchange event aims for mutual growth

Armando Neves

A three-day sister-school exchange activity between Hou Kong Middle School (Primary Section) and Shenzhen Shekou Yucai Education Group Yucai No. 2 Primary School concluded on May 29.

Chan Pou Sin, vice principal of Hou Kong Middle School, told the *Post* he hoped the event would allow students to gain insight into the learning attitudes and mindsets of their peers in the Chinese mainland, bringing a positive influence.

According to the Education and Youth Development Bureau's (DSEDJ) website, the Sister School Exchange Programme has long served as a vital link for regional educational collaboration, fostering friendly relations between schools in Macau, the mainland, and other countries.

Chan added that during this year's Sister School Exchange Programme, the most memorable moment was the cooking competition. Grade 4 students participated in flame-free cooking, while Grade 5 students joined peers from Yucai students to participate in the open-flame cooking competition. Chan said he believes this was highly meaningful for primary students to develop their education on a hard work-orientated spirit (勞動教育). Chan said he hopes that contacts between both schools can be deepened across more subjects to promote mutual growth in the future.

Two Hou Kong students, Foo Wan Yi and Si Ka I, told the *Post* that the classroom atmosphere became livelier after the Yucai students joined them. Their highlight was visiting the Macau Grand Prix Museum together to play VR games. They observed that the Yucai students remained highly focused in class, studying diligently even when they could not understand Cantonese. Fu said she hopes to treat her Shenzhen friends to Macau's specialty pork jerky (known as "bak kwa" – 肉干 – in southern Fujianese) in the future, while Si hopes to visit Xiamen for future exchanges.

Two Hou Kong teachers, Ng Wo Cheng and Chong Weng I, spoke about their classroom observations over the three days. Ng noted that Hou Kong students demonstrated high levels of initiative and active engagement during English language lessons. She added that although the Yucai students only start learning English in Grade 3, they were very hard-working in class and supported one another. Ng also praised the Yucai teachers for using open-ended questions, which helped students express themselves confidently.

Chong observed that the Yucai students possess a strong foundation in Chinese cultural literacy. Chong said that this has inspired her to encourage Hou Kong students to speak up more boldly. Differences in teaching materials between Macau and Shenzhen also became a focal point for discussion, helping to broaden students' horizons.

Students from the Yucai No. 2 Primary School also gave their thoughts. Huang Shuyao said the Hou Kong pupils were very active and friendly, with the whole class eagerly raising their hands to speak. Huang's fellow student, surnamed Zheng, said her most memorable moment was when her Macau friend stayed by her side to comfort her when she felt sad.

Li Moru, a sixth-grade student, thanked her Hou Kong friend for patiently translating Cantonese and explaining traditional Chinese characters. The pair became close friends through their shared love of drawing. Meanwhile, a student named Wu Xinran said she plans to invite her Macau friend to Shenzhen to experience water sports.

Yucai teachers also spoke highly of the exchange. Chen Meijun, a maths teacher, praised the campus for embodying cultural immersion and a people-centred educational philosophy. Zhang Yiming, a Chinese-language teacher, observed that while the pace of lessons in Macau is slower, the students are focused and clear in their thinking. Li Juan, another Chinese-language teacher, commended the Macau students for being polite and well-disciplined, expressing hope that the two schools could co-develop specialised courses in the future.

Lau Ying, director of Yucai's academic affairs, believes that both Yucai and Hou Kong can complement each other's educational strengths, recommending regular exchange visits. She also suggested launching dual-teacher classroom instruction co-taught by teachers from Yucai and Hou Kong.

Hou Kong student Su Pak Wang's mother, surnamed Si, told the *Post* that her child has become more cheerful and talkative since the exchange. Previously shy, her child now takes the initiative to make new friends. Si also said she believes that the activity successfully broadened her child's horizons, calling it a valuable experience for the students' development.

"Yucai" means "nurturing talent". Hou Kong ("oyster river") is one of Macau's ancient names.



Hou Kong Middle School (primary section) and Shenzhen Shekou Yucai Education Group Yucai No. 2 Primary School students pose at the Macau Grand Prix Museum (MPGM) on May 28. – Photos courtesy of Hou Kong Middle School



Youngsters showcase various printmaking works at FRC gallery

Rui Pastorin

A total of 46 printmaking works by primary and secondary school students were showcased at the Rui Cunha Foundation (FRC) gallery over five days, presenting the winning works from a recent competition while showcasing the techniques behind the craft.

Co-organised with the Macao Youth of Printmaking Association and having ended on Saturday, the exhibition, “The 7th Macau Primary and Secondary School Students’ Printmaking Yearly Exhibition”, featured artworks chosen from a recently-held contest, which, according to a statement from the gallery, had the most participants since its inception.

The winning works were chosen from 270 entries from 14 schools. Techniques that were showcased included relief, intaglio*, screen printing, and lithography, with the contest continuing to promote manual and traditional techniques

to youngsters.

In a separate statement, Macao Youth of Printmaking Association Vice President Wong Wai I said that the recent contest and exhibition continued their mission to bring the craft, which is deeply rooted in Macau and vital to its art scene, to schools, while highlighting it as a platform for teachers and students to connect, share ideas and learn from each other.

“The work collected each year is witness to the growth of students and reflects the deepening roots of printmaking education in schools”, noting that a new generation of printmakers can be nurtured through the contest being a regular event. ■

**Intaglio is a printmaking technique where an image is carved or etched below the surface of a metal plate. Ink is worked into these recessed grooves and the surface is wiped clean, before a high-pressure press forces damp paper into the lines to absorb the ink. – Gemini*



A gallerygoer examines one of the works on display at the Rui Cunha Foundation (FRC) gallery for the recently-concluded “The 7th Macau Primary and Secondary School Students’ Printmaking Yearly Exhibition”. – Photo: Rui Pastorin

IC opens call for music acts, activities at “hush! Beach Concerts x Urban Sports Wellfest 2026

Rui Pastorin

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) has put out an open call for local bands, musicians, workshop instructors and curators in themed music development projects, and curators of art installations for the upcoming “hush! Beach Concerts x Urban Sports Wellfest 2026, which is set to take place from November 14-15 at Hac Sa Beach.

Applications are open until June 18.

The bureau said in a statement yesterday that the event, organised in conjunction with integrated resort operator MGM, will centre on pop music and integrate “music, urban sports, and healthy lifestyle elements”.

Various stage designs will again

be incorporated, with the statement noting that the Hac Sa Beach stage “Hot Wave” will be the main stage. Other areas include the “Music Chill” lawn stage, the “hush! Kids” for families, and “Upbeat Power” for school and youth bands. Moreover, outdoor sports will meanwhile be featured in “Urban Sports Wellfest”, while outreach activities are also planned to take place from November 1 to 16.

The statement said that this year’s event further expands “its scale and diversity, extending music to the fields of sports and lifestyle”.

More details can be found on www.icm.gov.mo, or related social media pages. ■



This file photo taken by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) and downloaded from the “hush!” themed website shows a performance taking place during “hush! Beach Concerts x Urban Sports Wellfest 2025”.

929 Challenge expands into AIE Expo Macao, launches acceleration programme for startups

Khalel Vallo

The 6th edition of the 929 Challenge and the 2nd 929 Summit will be held on December 3-4 at Cotai Expo of The Venetian Macao as part of AIE Expo 2026, marking the first time the startup competition will be integrated into a major technology exhibition and introducing a new acceleration programme aimed at helping startups enter the Greater Bay Area (GBA) market.

“AIE” stands for “artificial intelligence expo”.

929 refers to Guangdong’s nine Greater Bay Area (GBA) cities, the nation’s two special administrative regions (SARs) in the GBA (Hong Kong and Macau), and the world’s nine Portuguese-speaking Countries (PSCs) – Angola, Brazil, Cabo Verde, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, Portugal, São Tomé and Príncipe, Timor-Leste (East Timor).

The new arrangement was announced during a press conference on Friday at the Complex of Commerce and Trade Cooperation Platform for China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (aka Forum Macao Complex) in Nam Van, saying the move will provide participating startups with direct access to more than 900 exhibitors and 50,000 professional visitors

from sectors including AI, robotics, digital health, smart equipment, mobility and consumer electronics.

According to a statement by the 929 Challenge Organising Committee on Friday, AIE Expo 2026 will adopt a dual-venue format, with Macau hosting innovation forums and product launches at Cotai Expo, while trade and procurement activities will be centred at the Zhuhai International Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The event continues to position itself as a platform connecting China and PSCs through entrepreneurship and innovation, the statement said.

A key addition this year is the launch of the 929 Acceleration Programme, a post-competition initiative designed to support startups entering the Macau and GBA markets. The programme will provide guidance on market entry, investor readiness, regulatory compliance and mentorship from more than 100 experts.

Addressing the press conference, Permanent Secretariat representative Danilo Afonso Henriques said the challenge translates Macau’s platform role between China and PSCs into “tangible opportunities for entrepreneurs, universities, and enterprises”, adding that the new



Permanent Secretariat representative Danilo Afonso Henriques addresses Friday’s “929 Challenge” press conference at the Forum Macao Complex in Nam Van. – Photo: Khalel Vallo

edition represents “a strategic leap forward”, with finalists gaining direct exposure to advanced industries in the GBA.

The competition will award a US\$40,000 (322,800 patacas) prize pool for the top three startups and universities, alongside soft-landing opportunities in Macau, Hong Kong, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen.

Applications for the 6th edition opened on Saturday and will close on October 9. The “bootcamp” phase is scheduled for October 11 through 15, while the summit and grand finale will take place on December 3-4, with the first cohort of the acceleration programme expected to begin in early 2027. ■

MUST Faculty of Medicine welcomes medical students from Timor-Leste

Staff Reporter

The Faculty of Medicine at the Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST) last week welcomed eight medical students from the private Timorese Catholic University (UCT), according to a MUST statement.

These students will participate in an intensive training programme focused on imaging anatomy, surgical skills, auscultation*, and ultrasound training, the private university in Taipa said in the statement released on Thursday.

The delegation was led by João Cândia de Freitas, UCT’s vice-rector and former minister for education of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, together with staff from the GX Foundation, based in Timor-Leste.

The statement said that the programme is designed to facilitate skills development and includes lectures delivered by a range of experts and professors.

“This initiative underscores our commitment to fostering educational exchanges between Macau and Portuguese-speaking countries. It also highlights our ongoing efforts to promote collaboration and enhance medical education in the region”, the statement said.

The statement noted that a similar programme has successfully taken place over the past few years



MUST and UCT representatives, including Billy Chan (front, second from right), director of MUST’s Centre for Education in Medical Education, and João Cândia de Freitas (front, centre), UCT’s vice-rector, as well as UCT students pose during a meeting on the MUST campus in Taipa on Thursday. – Photo courtesy of MUST

with institutions in Portugal.

“This marks the second iteration of our programme for students from East Timor, emphasising our dedication to international academic partnerships and the advancement of medical training”, the statement concluded.

UCT, based in the half-island nation’s capital Dili, was founded in 2021. MUST was established in 2000. Dr Billy Chan heads MUST’s Centre for Education in Medical Education.

GX Foundation is a non-governmental charitable organisation established in Hong Kong in 2018. According to its official website, it aims to provide medical and public health humanitarian assistance to Belt and Road (B&R) countries, embodying the spirit of “sharing”

and “people-to-people connectivity”. It is chaired by former Hong Kong SAR chief executive Leung Chun-ying, vice chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC).

Timor-Leste is the official Portuguese name of East Timor, which restored its independence in May 2002, after more than four centuries of foreign rule. ■

**Auscultation is the medical practice of listening to sounds inside the body, such as the heart, lungs, and intestines, to aid in diagnosis and treatment. Healthcare providers primarily use a stethoscope to evaluate the frequency, intensity, duration, and quality of these internal body sounds. – Gemini*

Macao Union Hospital's emergency services to be fully ready this year

Tony Wong

The Macao Union Hospital in Cotai hosted a public open day on Saturday, including a media tour, during which Lei Wai Seng, a deputy director of the hospital, said that with its intensive care unit (ICU) scheduled to come into operation later this month, the hospital's emergency department will gradually become fully operational in the second half of this year, eventually receiving all ambulance-transported patients from Coloane, Cotai, and parts of Taipa.

Dr Lei also said that as the hospital's radiotherapy centre has already come into full operation, the local government will no longer need to arrange for cancer patients requiring radiotherapy to receive treatment outside Macau.

The large-scale healthcare complex in south Cotai is officially known as Islands Healthcare Complex – Macao Medical Centre of Peking Union Medical College Hospital (CMM-PUMCH). It is jointly operated by the internationally renowned Peking Union Medical College Hospital (PUMCH) in Beijing and the Macau government thanks to the Central People's Government's support.

"Islands" is the official term referring to Taipa, Coloane and Cotai.

The healthcare complex, Macau's largest hospital, started its trial operation on December 20, 2023, after which it officially opened on September 16, 2024.

For short, the large-scale public healthcare facility is officially known as Macao Union Medical Centre or Macao Union Hospital.

Since the start of its trial operation in December 2023, a Health Bureau (SSM) emergency station had been operated by the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre, headquartered on the peninsula's Guia Hill, in an area of the Macao Union Hospital, providing basic emergency services for those in Taipa, Coloane and Cotai, but without ambulance services. Eventually, the operation

of the facility was transferred to the Macao Union Hospital in January this year, when it was upgraded from an emergency station to an emergency department.

The Macao Union Hospital's emergency department began accepting ambulance-transported patients from Taipa, Coloane and Cotai last month, though only under certain circumstances.

The city's ambulance services are run by the Fire Services Bureau (CB).

During Saturday's media tour, Dr Lei briefed reporters about various advanced medical machines in the hospital while elaborating on the healthcare complex's latest operations and services and future developments.

Dr Lei noted that after taking over the operation of the emergency treatment facility from the Health Bureau in January this year, the Macao Union Hospital had kept its modus operandi largely unchanged until last month when its emergency department started accepting ambulance-transported patients.

Dr Lei said that his hospital began collaborating with the Fire Services Bureau last month, accepting injured individuals from traffic accidents or other accidents in Taipa, Coloane and Cotai.

Dr Lei said that his hospital also launched cooperation with a residential care home for senior citizens in Coloane's Seac Pai Van public housing neighbourhood and one in the island's Ka Ho hamlet last month. Since then, those in these two care homes calling ambulance services will be taken to the Macao Union Hospital, he said.

Dr Lei said that with its ICU scheduled to come into operation later this month, his hospital's emergency department will gradually receive ambulance-transported patients from Taipa, Coloane and Cotai more often in the second half of this year. Eventually, he said, the Macao Union Hospital will, in general, receive all ambulance-transported patients from Taipa, Coloane and Cotai.



Lei Wai Seng, a deputy director of the Macao Union Hospital, briefs journalists about a CT scanner during Saturday's media tour, which covered the hospital's radiology centre, radiotherapy centre, ambulatory medical centre, and specialist clinics

– Photo: Tony Wong

For patients or injured individuals in Taipa, Dr Lei said, they will be taken to either the Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre in the peninsula or the Macao Union Hospital, depending on whichever is closer. The former is informally known as Peak Hospital.

"For patients in some areas in central Taipa, it would be quicker to get them to the Peak Hospital via the old bridge", he said.

The Macau-Taipa Governor Nobre de Carvalho Bridge is informally known as the "old bridge".

The Macao Union Hospital has three deputy directors, one from Macau and two from the Chinese mainland. The hospital's current director is Liu Zhengyin, who is from PUMCH in Beijing.

Dr Lei, a senior official from the Macau Health Bureau, was appointed as a deputy director of the Macao Union Hospital in early 2024. He previously worked as a clinical director of the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre.

Dr Lei noted that the Macao Union Hospital has three charging schemes for patients. The first level is free medical services available to Macau residents who are eligible for free public health services. Upon referral from the Health Bureau,

they can enjoy free medical services at the Macao Union Hospital.

Dr Lei noted that the second level is fee-based medical services where Macau residents have to pay but with a 30-percent discount on the fees, while non-local residents such as non-resident workers (NRWs) are charged the standard rates.

The third level consists of private health services providing locals and non-locals alike with high-end healthcare options, but local residents are offered a 10-percent discount.

Radiotherapy covers all types of cancers

Dr Lei also noted that the Macao Union Hospital features Macau's largest radiotherapy centre, which has now fully come into operation, covering radiotherapy for all types of cancers. Consequently, the local government will no longer need to arrange for cancer patients requiring radiotherapy to receive treatment outside Macau, he said.

Dr Lei also said that about 90 percent of the medical services provided by his hospital are currently still free medical services referred by the Health Bureau. He said that the open day event aimed to enable more residents to

gain a better understanding of his hospital's latest medical services so that more of those in need would choose to seek treatment there.

It has been the third time that the hospital hosted a public open day, after one in 2024 and one in 2025.

Dr Lei said that his hospital's specialist clinics received 33,455 patients last year, while they received about 23,000 patients in the first five months of this year.

Dr Lei said that his hospital received 1,009 inpatients last year, while the number of inpatients received in the first five months of this year, 1,057, already exceeded last year's total number.

Dr Lei also said that his hospital is aiming for its oncology centre to become a one-stop centre for cancer patients, providing comprehensive care throughout the entire treatment process, spanning from diagnosis, surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy, to palliative care.

Dr Lei said that his hospital will continue to place strong emphasis on enhancing its capacity to conduct complex surgical procedures, while it will increase the number of inpatient beds in service from the current 150 to 300 next year.

The hospital will run 852 inpatient beds ultimately when it is fully operational. Dr Lei underlined that his hospital will only gradually increase the number of inpatient beds in service in line with Macau's changing medical needs over time, pointing out that an increase in inpatient beds will require a corresponding rise in staff capacity.

He also said that the specialty medical services provided by his hospital and the Peak Hospital will complement each other. For instance, he said, his hospital provides radiotherapy, which the Peak Hospital does not provide.

The private Kiang Wu Hospital also runs a radiotherapy centre.

Dr Lei also said that considering Macau's low birth rate, his hospital does not plan to launch paediatric or obstetrics and gynaecology services, both of which are currently provided by the Peak Hospital. ■

Driving instructor discards lit cigarette end, causes fire at driving school

Staff Reporter

A driving instructor in his sixties was arrested late last month for causing a fire in late April by carelessly discarding a lit cigarette end at the driving school in Cotai, a Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesperson said during a regular press conference on Friday.

The suspect is a 62-year-old local man surnamed Mou.

On April 27, the Judiciary Police were notified by the Fire Services Bureau (CB) regarding a fire in the heavy vehicle parking area of the driving examination

centre and driving school in Cotai. Cardboard and other items in the bed of a lorry had caught fire. The blaze was extinguished with water by staff on-site before firefighters arrived.

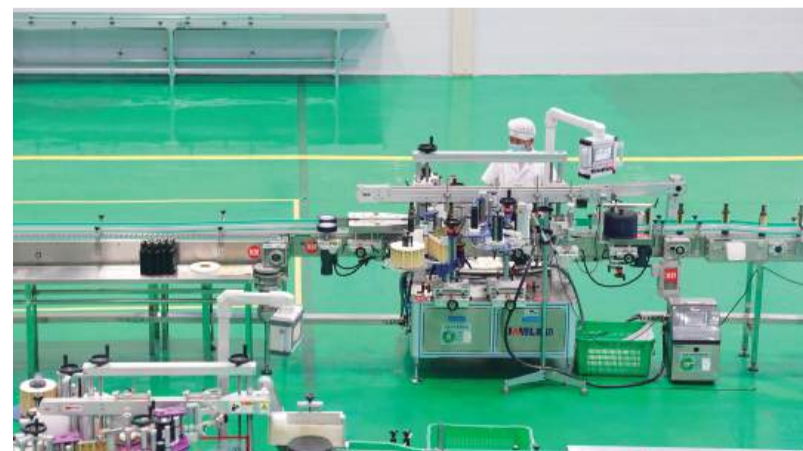
Following an investigation, PJ officers concluded that the fire had been caused by someone carelessly throwing away a lit cigarette end.

The police identified Mou as the suspect and summoned him for questioning on May 28.

On the day of the fire, Mou was smoking beside the lorry while waiting for a student, after

which he casually tossed the lit cigarette end into the lorry bed. Shortly afterwards, another driving instructor standing some distance away noticed smoke and flames coming from the vehicle. This instructor rushed over and, together with Mou, put the fire out with buckets of water. They then called the emergency services, after which firefighters arrived at the scene.

The suspect has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) for further questioning, the spokesperson said. ■



This photo taken yesterday shows an olive oil production line at an olive processing company in Wudu District, Longnan City, Gansu Province. Wudu is one of China's prime areas for olive cultivation, with its olive industry leading the nation in scale, output and economic returns. By 2025, the olive plantation area of Wudu covered about 42,800 hectares, generating a total output value of four billion yuan. The district has developed a comprehensive olive industry chain which incorporates over 80 products across 10 major categories, including olive oil, health supplements, and skincare items.

– Xinhua

Wide-ranging cooperation boosts China-DPRK friendship

Analysis

BEIJING – Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and Chinese president, will pay a state visit to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) today and tomorrow, his first state visit to the country in seven years, at the invitation of Kim Jong Un, general secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea and president of the State Affairs of the DPRK.

This year marks the 65th anniversary of the signing of the China-DPRK Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance. In recent years, under the strategic guidance of the top leaders of the two parties and the two countries, China-DPRK traditional friendly and cooperative relations have maintained sound and steady development.

Exchanges and cooperation in areas including the economy, culture, education, and youth affairs have produced fruitful outcomes, delivering benefits to both countries and their peoples, injecting new vitality into the traditional friendship between the two nations, and making positive contributions to regional peace and development.

ECONOMIC AND TRADE COOPERATION

On May 4, the 24th Pyongyang Spring International Trade Fair opened at the Pyongyang Central Youth Hall, where Chinese products on display proved popular among DPRK visitors.

Yun Jong Ho, the DPRK's minister of external economic relations, toured some booths operated by Chinese enterprises.

Noting that the DPRK continues to make new progress in the era of comprehensive socialist development, Yun extended a warm welcome to outstanding Chinese enterprises attending the fair and expressed confidence that the two sides will further expand exchanges and cooperation in economy, trade and other fields, contributing to their respective economic and social development.

In recent years, China-DPRK economic and trade cooperation has shown a positive development momentum. According to Chinese official statistics, bilateral trade volume reached

2.735 billion U.S. dollars in 2025.

The Guomenwan trade zone in Dandong, a city in northeast China's Liaoning Province, has witnessed increasingly close economic and trade exchanges between China and the DPRK. In 2025, the zone recorded 168 million yuan in imports through border residents' trade, with a total of 22,000 participants engaged in such transactions over the course of the year.

Zhang Xu, an official with the trade zone, said that during this year's May Day holiday, Chinese representatives from the trade zone participated in an international exhibition in the DPRK, and held talks with more than 30 DPRK enterprises. Since May, "representatives from DPRK trading companies have been coming to talk with us almost every weekend," Zhang said.

Liang Tongjun, president of the China Chamber of Commerce in the DPRK, said that as an important vehicle for non-governmental economic and trade exchanges, the chamber is willing to promote mutual understanding and affinity between the two peoples through economic and trade cooperation, as well as cultural and people-to-people exchanges.

Zhang Huizhi, deputy director of the Northeast Asian Research Center at Jilin University, said that practical cooperation between China and the DPRK across economic, social and other fields will further promote bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the region, contributing to the stability and prosperity of Northeast Asia.

PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE CONNECTIVITY

On March 12, an international passenger train from Dandong arrived in Pyongyang, marking the resumption of international passenger train services between China and the DPRK.

On March 30, an Air China passenger plane from Beijing arrived at Pyongyang International Airport, signaling the formal resumption of the Chinese carrier's passenger flight operations between the capitals of China and the DPRK. Road, rail and air links between the two countries have all been resumed thus far.

China State Railway Group Co., Ltd. said that the international passenger train serves not only as an important channel for cross-border travel, but also as a dynamic link of friendship between the two countries, adding that it will further facilitate personnel exchanges and promote people-to-people connectivity.

Cultural and artistic exchanges are an important component of China-DPRK friendship and serve as a key means of fostering mutual understanding and emotional connection between the two peoples. Multiple Chinese films have received awards at the Pyongyang International Film Festival, while the DPRK's April Spring Friendship Art Festival has repeatedly invited Chinese art troupes to participate.

The year 2024 marked the 75th anniversary of diplomatic ties between China and the DPRK, as well as the China-DPRK Friendship Year.

At the opening ceremony of the China-DPRK Friendship Year, artists from both countries presented their long-standing and distinctive cultural traditions through refined performances, expressing the two peoples' sincere hope to carry forward and promote their traditional friendship, which resonated strongly with the audience.

YOUTH EXCHANGES

The Grand People's Study House, located in Pyongyang's Kim Il Sung Square, is an important documentation center and a hub for social and cultural education in the DPRK. It has long been offering Chinese language training courses, with each session attracting as many as 600 to 700 students. The institution said Pyongyang citizens have shown strong enthusiasm for learning Chinese.

Huang Li, a Chinese language teacher from Liaodong University, northeast China's Liaoning Province, has taught at Pyongyang University of Foreign Studies on three occasions and has developed a deep friendship with local teachers and students.

She has taught over 1,000 students, who have become an important force in promoting China-DPRK traditional friendship and advancing exchanges between the two countries.

According to the plan, Huang will return

to the DPRK to teach in the second half of this year. "This time, in addition to Chinese language instruction, I hope to offer practical courses in areas such as economy, trade, tourism and law, to help cultivate interdisciplinary and application-oriented talent," she said.

The Pyongyang University of Science and Technology resumed hosting the Chinese Proficiency Test (HSK) in 2025. During a meeting with Chinese Ambassador to the DPRK Wang Yajun, Choe Ryong Ho, the university's vice rector, said that Chinese language education at the university has been developing steadily, and the university will continue to improve Chinese teaching, with the aim of further strengthening practical cooperation and talent exchanges with relevant Chinese universities.

Niu Xiao, a lecturer at the School of Government of Shanghai University of Political Science and Law, once studied in the DPRK. In late August last year, she was invited by Kim Il Sung University to attend an international academic seminar in Pyongyang.

"That was both an academic journey and a vivid experience of witnessing China-DPRK traditional friendship and the DPRK's economic and social development," Niu said. She observed a significant increase in the number of private cars on the streets of Pyongyang and greater diversification in local payment methods.

In early May this year, 70 Chinese government scholarship students from 16 universities across China arrived in Pyongyang to begin their studies at prestigious DPRK universities such as Kim Il Sung University and Kim Hyong Jik University of Education.

"Studying in the DPRK allows us to more deeply appreciate the vibrant vitality of China-DPRK traditional friendship," Gu Dian, a student from Shanghai International Studies University, told Xinhua.

"We will transform what we have learned in the DPRK into concrete actions to promote China-DPRK friendship, ensuring that the people-to-people and cultural exchanges between the two countries are passed down from generation to generation," said Gu.

– Xinhua

Experts draw inspiration for Eurasia from China's governance under Xi's leadership

Analysis

ST. PETERSBURG – The Russian edition of the first volume of "China's Governance Under Xi Jinping's Leadership" has received a warm response from representatives of media organizations, think tanks, and government institutions across Eurasia.

The book was officially launched at a ceremony on Wednesday in St. Petersburg, attended by around 100 representatives from China, Russia, Kazakhstan, and other Eurasian countries.

Participants said the volume vividly presents the wisdom and practice of Chinese President Xi Jinping in state governance, highlighting a people-centered philosophy and commitment to improving people's well-being.

They noted that the book demonstrates China's experience in maintaining policy continuity through strategic planning, advancing modernization through reform and innovation, and fostering spirit of national rejuvenation through cultural confidence, which have significant implications.

For countries across Eurasia navigating economic transformation and geopolitical change, China's practical approach of integrating long-term goals, public well-being, institutional effectiveness and



President of Xinhua News Agency Fu Hua (center), TASS Director General Andrey Kondrashov (right) and Chinese Consul General in St. Petersburg Luo Zhanhui jointly unveil the Russian edition of the first volume of "China's Governance Under Xi Jinping's Leadership" during the launch ceremony at the 29th St. Petersburg International Economic Forum in St. Petersburg, Russia, on Wednesday. – Xinhua

openness provides valuable inspiration and reference for achieving independent, stable and sustainable development, said the

participants. Andrey Ostrovsky, chief researcher at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the

Russian Academy of Sciences, said the book reveals the key to China's success in governance.

According to Ostrovsky, China has addressed development challenges through comprehensively deepening reform, promoted high-quality development through scientific and technological innovation, and continuously advanced the modernization of its national governance system and governance capacity. Strong institutional guarantees and effective policy implementation have helped China achieve remarkable development accomplishments, he said.

Ravshan Nazarov, associate professor at the Tashkent branch of the Plekhanov Russian University of Economics, said the volume systematically explains Xi's theoretical and practical achievements in state governance, emphasizing long-term strategic planning, ensuring a high degree of policy stability and historical continuity, and steadily advancing Chinese modernization.

China's people-centered governance philosophy plays a core role in its policymaking, he said, adding that this is reflected in advances in targeted poverty alleviation, social security, education and healthcare. – Xinhua

Sydney police hunt gunman who opened fire on funeral venue

SYDNEY – A manhunt was underway in Sydney yesterday after shots were fired at the venue of a planned funeral for a prominent underworld figure killed in Vietnam, police and local media said.

Purported leader of Sydney's so-called "Coconut Cartel" Lorenzo Lemalu was shot dead last month outside a seafood restaurant in Ho Chi Minh City.

Vietnamese police arrested two suspects, both of Samoan nationality, who later admitted to the killing in a televised confession.

On Saturday, footage emerged of a gunman in a car firing multiple

shots at a venue slated to host Lemalu's funeral in Sydney's west.

The video on a social media channel sharing updates about the city's underworld showed a man firing an assault rifle while another tells him to aim for the venue's windows and laughing.

Police told AFP no-one was wounded and they later found an abandoned car linked to the shooting set alight.

The funeral was held at a prominent Sydney mosque yesterday, national broadcaster ABC said.

Regular Sydneysiders have found themselves in the crosshairs

of escalating gang violence in Australia's largest city this year.

In February, elderly grandfather Chris Baghsarian was found dead after being kidnapped in what police said was a case of mistaken identity.

Neither Baghsarian nor his family had any underworld connections and the kidnapers were instead targeting the relative of a man linked to the west Sydney-based Alameddine crime network, police said.

Leading Australian criminologist Vince Hurley has warned the city's organised crime groups are becoming "more reckless". – AFP

Japan's prosecutors office to hold internal probe after rape allegation

TOKYO – The Japanese prosecutors office will launch an investigation into harassment within the organisation, the justice minister said Friday, in light of a rape allegation involving a former regional chief.

Very few women in Japan speak out about sexual assault but a prosecutor who uses the pseudonym Hikari came forward in 2024 to accuse her former boss of raping her six years earlier.

She demanded an independent probe, but her request was rejected, prompting her to resign in April.

Kentaro Kitagawa, who retired after serving as head of the Osaka District Public Prosecutor's Office, was arrested and admitted the assault but later withdrew his statement, saying the sex was consensual.

Justice minister Hiroshi Hiraguchi told reporters Friday that "a probe into harassment is scheduled for this fiscal year for all staff" at the prosecutor's office.

But the question of an independent panel "needs to be decided with the utmost caution" due to the ongoing criminal case, he said.

Hikari made a request to the justice ministry and the prosecutors' office that such a panel be set up to investigate cases involving others in the legal profession and to implement measures to prevent harassment.

She told AFP on Friday that an internal investigation was

"completely pointless", adding that an independent probe was "absolutely necessary".

"They seem to completely fail to grasp that the cause cannot be identified and the problem will recur unless a fair and impartial investigation is carried out," she said.

Hikari has previously said she is "certain that there are other instances of harassment and additional offences" inside the prosecutor's office.

She has been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and her condition worsened after she learned in 2024 that people close to Kitagawa, especially an assistant prosecutor – who Hikari says is his lover – had spread malicious rumours about her.

She filed a criminal complaint against the assistant prosecutor the following year, but the Osaka prosecutor's office dismissed it, only imposing a reprimand.

Hikari has said she was not used to drinking strong alcohol and lost her memory halfway through an office gathering in 2018.

The next thing she knew, she said, she was in Kitagawa's home and was being raped.

Hikari kept quiet after it happened, as Kitagawa had pleaded with her not to go public, saying it would be a damaging scandal for the organisation and threatening to harm himself, she said. – AFP



Activists from Ecoton (Ecological Observation and Wetlands Conservation) wearing fish masks take part in a protest calling for clean rivers free of rubbish and industrial waste, as well as protection for the river fish, as part of World Environment Day celebrations in Surabaya, Indonesia on Friday. – AFP

Missing Malaysian hiker's rescue hailed a 'miracle'

KUALA LUMPUR – The rescue of a Malaysian hiker found alive after two weeks missing in the wilderness was hailed as "a miracle" by a friend yesterday, as authorities ended a massive search that gripped the nation.

Indigenous Malaysians found a battered Jaslinda Saludin late Saturday in a forested area near the small town of Tapah, in central Malaysia's Perak state, some way from where she was first reported missing, local papers said.

Jaslinda, 49, described as an experienced hiker, was last seen two weeks ago while undertaking the Trans Spencer Chapman trek, an arduous 34-kilometre slog

along the treacherous Titiwangsa mountain range.

She departed alone from a rest camp for an ascent of Gunung Batu Putih, also known as White Rock Mountain, before being reported missing.

Her disappearance made front-page news in the Southeast Asian country and triggered a major search involving helicopters, local indigenous Malaysian communities, and a crack team from Malaysia's Fire and Rescue Department.

She was discovered on Saturday afternoon by local fishermen, saying she survived by drinking from rivers and eating berries and

other forest plants.

"When we heard that she had been found safe, it felt like our prayers had been answered. It is truly a miracle," said her friend, Hishammuddin Ahmad.

After her rescue, Jaslinda was taken to hospital.

"She suffered minor injuries, including insect bites and some wounds to her head," Sabarodzi Nor Ahmad, assistant director of operations at the Perak Fire and Rescue Department, told *The Star* newspaper.

Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim thanked those involved "for protecting sister Jaslinda" in a Saturday post on X. – AFP

Rescuers halt search for last 2 men lost in Laos cave

VIENTIANE – Rescuers called off their search Saturday for two men trapped in a semi-submerged cave in Laos for more than two weeks, as the site became unstable and survival hopes faded.

Seven villagers became trapped in the cave in central Xaysomboun province on May 20 when flash floods blocked their exit as they hunted bats for food and searched for gold in old mining areas, state media said.

Rescue teams located five of the men alive a week later, with one extracted by divers on May 29 and four guided out the following day after water was pumped from the flooded cavern.

The two others remained missing despite intensive searching by Laos and international rescue teams.

Lee Kian Lie, a Malaysian cave diver who joined the operation on May 28, told AFP it was at an "end" as the risks of continuing outweighed the slim chances of the men's rescue.

"We were so close," Lee said. "The water in the cave was already manageable, but the cave entrance started to become unstable."

"To continue the operation is high risk," he added. "They will continue to manage the water by pumping and digging at possible resurgence points to let the water flow out faster. Perhaps a miracle will happen."

"Everyone tried. We tried. I am sorry for the family."

Lee described the mission as the most dangerous rescue operation he

had experienced, saying the team faced flooding, unstable cave structures, tight restrictions and poor air quality.

Thai lead rescuer Kengkad Bongkawong said in a social media post on Saturday that "no one is allowed inside the cave" because "it is too risky for anyone to enter", but water pumping operations would persist outside.

"Even though we don't know the current condition of those two individuals, reducing the water level inside the cave is the best approach right now," he posted on Facebook.

"There are still food rations and survival supplies that we have placed at various points inside the cave. If miracles exist, I believe their expertise will guide them out safely."

Kengkad had earlier said rising rainwater flows had reduced the vertical space inside the cave to around 30 centimetres – half what rescuers worked in during the operation's earlier phases.

"From today onwards, the rain will become progressively heavier," he warned in his Saturday post.

By Friday, key cave specialists including Finnish diver Mikko Paasi and Japan's Yoshitaka Isaji had already left the site.

The five survivors were discovered huddled in a narrow passage around 300 metres from the cave's entrance, and said the two missing men had entered the site separately. – AFP

Russian drug suspects arrested in Bali after high-speed car chase

INDONESIA – Indonesian authorities arrested two Russian nationals suspected of smuggling drugs into Bali after a high-speed car chase on the popular resort island, an official said yesterday.

The woman, 52, and the 40-year-old man were arrested after trying to smuggle close to eight kilograms of hashish in a suitcase from Thailand, the National Narcotics Agency (BNN) said in a statement.

"We have seized the evidence, 7.8 kilograms of hashish," BNN chief Suyudi Ario Seto said.

The woman, identified by her initials "KK", arrived in Jakarta's

Soekarno-Hatta airport before driving to Bali in a rental vehicle to meet the man at a seaport on Friday.

The agency said the man, identified by his initials "SK", picked up the woman and dropped her, along with the case, at an unidentified location before attempting to flee.

Officials pursued the man and said he had been driving recklessly and hit several pedestrians before being stopped by authorities.

Both were taken into custody on Friday, the agency said without providing further details.

An investigation to determine whether the pair are part of a larger

syndicate is underway, BNN said.

Indonesia has some of the world's toughest anti-drug laws, including the death penalty for traffickers, but has maintained a moratorium on executions for several years.

There are dozens of traffickers on death row. Indonesia last carried out the death sentence in 2016, when one Indonesian and three Nigerians convicted of drug offences were executed by firing squad.

Two British men were sentenced in March to nine and 11 years in prison respectively after they were found guilty of smuggling cocaine into Bali. – AFP

Viral 'Cockroach Party' leads India protest over exam fiasco



Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) founder Bhijeeet Dipke addresses his supporters during a protest over alleged irregularities in the country's major examinations, in New Delhi on Saturday. —AFP

Bhuvan Bagga

NEW DELHI – Hundreds of young students gathered in New Delhi on Saturday for the first street protest organised by the satirical "Cockroach People's Party" over alleged irregularities in recent major examinations.

Protesters, some in paper cockroach masks – a reference to reported remarks by India's top judge – called for the resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over the irregularities, including question paper leaks and technical glitches.

"We want accountability from the government," 16-year-old Utkarsh Raj, who hopes to pursue a medical career, told AFP.

"How is it that exam papers get leaked in this country? How is this right?"

The protest, watched closely

by police officers in riot gear, was led by Abhijeet Dipke, whose parody "Cockroach Janta Party" (CJP) – a play on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) – has won millions of followers on social media since its launch last month.

"This protest is for the future of this country. This protest is for jobs," Dipke, a former political communications strategist for the opposition Aam Aadmi Party, told the rally.

"The youth of the country... will fight," said the 30-year-old organiser, who returned to India from the United States on Saturday.

The movement emerged after India's Chief Justice Surya Kant reportedly likened young people who criticised the government to "cockroaches" and "parasites" during a court hearing, sparking outrage.

Kant later said his comments were taken out of context.

Despite rapid economic growth, millions of people in the world's most populous nation still struggle to find stable and well-paying jobs, fuelling discontent.

'No credibility'

Last month, authorities scrapped the nationwide medical college entrance test, one of the country's most competitive exams, after investigators uncovered a question paper leak.

That came on top of another scandal related to the online marking system of tests taken by nearly two million high school students.

"India deserves better administration of such crucial exams," said 20-year-old protester Sarthak, who gave only one name.

Sapan Gyan, 52, who

accompanied his sons to the protest, said that "young people... can't have a situation where these exam systems have no credibility left."

Environmental activist Sonam Wangchuk, 59, who has been at loggerheads with the government over demands for greater autonomy for the Himalayan region of Ladakh, said the students affected by the exam failures "have no voice, no say".

The CJP – whose pages have been blocked on some social media platforms – has over 22 million followers on Instagram, well above Modi's ruling party or India's main opposition party.

In recent years, some of India's neighbours including Bangladesh and Nepal have witnessed youth-led movements against perceived corruption and political apathy that toppled incumbent governments. —AFP

'I thought I would perish': Everest survivor recounts ordeal

KATHMANDU – A Nepali mountaineer who survived nearly a week on Mount Everest said he "chewed ice" to stay alive, as he recovered in a hospital after a miraculous rescue that stunned the climbing community.

Dawa Sherpa, 57, disappeared in brutal conditions on the upper slopes of the world's tallest mountain on May 30 during one of the final climbs of the spring season.

With few climbers still on the peak and his oxygen exhausted, relatives had given up hope and begun ritual mourning prayers, believing he had died on the mountain.

"I didn't think I would be alive," he told BBC Nepali on Friday from his hospital bed.

"I thought I would perish this way. I didn't get lost. As the oxygen ran out, I fell behind. After the oxygen finished, I couldn't walk."

Left stranded in freezing temperatures near Everest's "death zone", where oxygen levels are critically low, Dawa Sherpa said he survived for days with almost no food or water.

"I didn't eat anything for the first two days. Then I began chewing ice. It hurt my teeth. I chewed the ice hard," he said.

He survived on a few chocolates and snacks he found in his pockets.

"I soaked them in water and had them," he said.

Dawa Sherpa, also known as "Hillary" after legendary climber Edmund Hillary, had told others after his rescue that at one point he fell into a crevasse before managing to climb out.

Jubilation and anger

"Stepping on the snow, I stood up and looked above... It felt I could get out from there," he said.

"I then looked for ropes and found one. Then I held on to it and walked... eventually I came down."

He said he walked day and night towards base camp until finally encountering people almost a week later.

He was found crawling towards the base camp on the morning of June 4 by the Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee (SPCC), a Nepali team that helps set routes on Everest and clean up waste left behind.

"Boys from SPCC were going up to collect the waste. I met them. They carried me down."

He was flown to Kathmandu for treatment for frostbite, severe dehydration and a fractured thigh bone, doctors said.

"He is doing well. We had a chat," his daughter Mendo Lhamu Sherpa told AFP.

His survival has sparked celebration among fellow climbers, but also anger from family members who accused rescue teams of failing to locate him sooner.

Nepal Mountaineering Association President Fur Gelje Sherpa called the survival extraordinary but said the incident highlighted serious concerns over climber safety.

"It is irresponsible and inhumane to leave a person behind," he said. "I believe that an investigation committee must be formed to hold the responsible people accountable for this."

Everest guide Rinji Sherpa, who comes from the same village as Dawa Sherpa, said the climber was highly experienced and familiar with the dangers of high-altitude mountaineering.

"He is very lucky, he has had several close calls before but he has survived," he said.

At least five climbers – two Indians and three Nepalis – died during this year's Everest season.

More than 1,000 climbers reached Everest's summit this season, according to preliminary Nepali government figures, making it the busiest season on record. —AFP

S Korean president nominates would-be 2nd woman PM

SEOUL – South Korean President Lee Jae Myung nominated Han Seong-sook to be his next prime minister yesterday, making her only the second woman to hold the post if confirmed by parliament.

Han currently serves as minister for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) and Startups.

The nomination comes after Lee's party dominated local elections on Wednesday, although the Democratic Party lost the high-profile Seoul mayoral race to the opposition.

The elections also sparked controversy over ballot shortages that affected 50 polling stations nationwide, prompting the head of the state election watchdog to resign.

Lee has "judged nominee Han to be the right person to take responsibility

for growth and people's livelihoods at a time when the country faces a major strategic transition driven by AI innovation and complex global crises", Lee's chief of staff Kang Hoon-sik told reporters at a news conference.

Han's nomination requires parliamentary approval, but is expected to be confirmed as the ruling party holds a majority in the 300-member National Assembly, barring any major ethical concerns or scandals.

If confirmed, the 58-year-old will become only the second woman to serve as prime minister.

The first was Han Myeong-sook, who held the post from 2006 to 2007.

Outgoing Prime Minister Kim Min-seok is widely expected to run for the leadership of the ruling Democratic Party. —AFP



This undated handout photo released yesterday by the presidential Blue House in Seoul shows a portrait of Han Seong-sook, South Korean Minister of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises and Startups. South Korea's President Lee Jae Myung nominated yesterday Startups, Han, to be his next prime minister, making her only the second woman to hold the post if confirmed by parliament. —AFP

Kim's sister says nuclear programme 'line of no retreat'

Kang Jin-kyu

SEOUL – North Korea's nuclear weapons programme is "the line of no retreat", the powerful sister of leader Kim Jong Un said in a statement carried by state media yesterday ahead of a visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Pyongyang has long insisted on its right to nuclear weapon and ballistic missile programmes, although they are forbidden under the terms of UN Security Council sanctions. It enshrined its nuclear status in its constitution in 2023.

"The DPRK's status as a nuclear weapons state is the line of no retreat," Kim's sister Kim Yo Jong said in the English version of a statement published by North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), using the North's official name.

"We will never tolerate any threat or compromise related to our sovereignty and security," she said.

She also cited reported US weapons sales to South Korea, describing them as the "ceaseless arms buildup of the hostile countries", in justifying Pyongyang's efforts to strengthen its arsenal.

Kim Yo Jong is a key player in the

North's communications and foreign policy and her statement came on the eve of Xi's visit, which, according to state media, is scheduled to take place on today and tomorrow.

Beijing is a vital source of political and economic support to North Korea, one of the most diplomatically isolated countries in the world and which is under heavy international sanctions.

Kim Jong Un inspected a major munitions factory at the weekend and called for it to boost production capacity, according to a separate KCNA report yesterday.

This was "in order to supply enough quantity of missiles", it quoted him as saying.

'Escapist dreams'

Kim Yo Jong also criticised Washington over its comments that the goal of denuclearising North Korea had been reaffirmed during the summit between US President Donald Trump and Xi in Beijing last month.

The White House posted a fact sheet following the summit stating that "President Trump and President Xi confirmed their shared goal to denuclearise North Korea", but Kim Yo Jong said it was false.

"Still, some officials in the United States have failed to wake from their escapist and anachronistic dreams," she said.

"This is nothing but an old practise of the US for spreading false information."

Kim Yo Jong also rejected Washington's attempts to deny or challenge the North's status as a nuclear power, saying it "has no legally binding force".

"The line of steadily beefing up the nuclear war deterrent for self-defence, clarified by the head of state, is an irreversible final conclusion to be carried out unconditionally," she said.

The statement underscores Pyongyang's "sensitivity" to any suggestion of a US-China agreement on North Korean denuclearisation, Hong Min, an analyst at the Korea Institute for National Unification, told AFP.

"Kim's core message was a categorical rejection of reports of US-China discussions on North Korean denuclearisation as 'false information'," he said.

It is possible that Pyongyang had "confirmed with Beijing" during the coordination process for the summit that such discussion had not taken place, Hong said. —AFP

Israel strikes south Beirut after intercepting Hezbollah launches

Nader Durgham

BEIRUT – Israel's military struck Beirut's southern suburbs yesterday, hitting apartments in two buildings, after saying it had intercepted projectiles launched by Hezbollah into Israeli territory.

Israel and Hezbollah regularly exchange fire but the south of the capital – including districts seen as bastions of the Iran-backed group – has been relatively spared, having been struck only twice since mid-April.

Israel later issued an evacuation warning for most of the southern Lebanese city of Tyre and its surroundings, a more frequent site of strikes.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office announced the army "just struck a militant command centre in Beirut's Dahiyeh district, in response to Hezbollah's fire towards Israeli territory".

The strikes "targeted two apartments in two buildings", according to Lebanon's state-run National News Agency (NNA).

An AFP photographer saw two apartments damaged in a building on a narrow street, and traffic congestion as residents tried to leave the suburb while the Lebanese army deployed to the area.

Earlier last week in Washington, Lebanese and Israeli envoys touted a conditional truce that would have required Hezbollah to stop firing and withdraw from near the Israeli border.

But Hezbollah rejected the agreement, demanding a full Israeli



Smoke rises from the site of an Israeli airstrike that targeted a neighbourhood in the southern Lebanese coastal city of Tyre yesterday.

– AFP

withdrawal from Lebanese territory.

Even after the deal was announced, Israel warned it would strike Beirut's southern suburbs should Hezbollah attack northern Israel.

Air raid sirens sounded on the Israeli side of the border earlier yesterday, with the military saying "two projectiles that crossed from Lebanon into Israeli territory were intercepted".

It later said it "dismantled the launchers used by Hezbollah terrorists to carry out the attack".

There was no immediate comment from the Iran-backed group, which claimed separate attacks against Israeli troops in Lebanon yesterday.

Iranian warning

Lebanon was drawn into the Middle East war when Hezbollah fired rockets at Israel on March 2 in support of its patron Iran.

Tehran has since insisted that any deal to end the wider war – paused by a separate April ceasefire – must also halt the fighting in Lebanon.

The spokesman for the Iranian parliament's national security commission, Ebrahim Rezaei, threatened "a decisive and painful response" to yesterday's strikes.

"These rabid dogs must be disciplined and put back in their place. Look at the sky over the occupied lands tonight," he said,

referring to Israeli territory.

Iran's insistence that the conflicts are linked has complicated negotiations for Washington. In an interview aired yesterday, US President Donald Trump called for Israel to take a more precise approach.

"I'd like to see a more surgical attack on Hezbollah," he told NBC's "Meet the Press" in an interview conducted Friday. "I'd like to see Lebanon have a better life."

Trump has said previously he would like to "separate" the discussions on Lebanon from the negotiations with Iran, and reiterated in the interview he was "not demanding" Lebanon be included.

Tyre warning

Lebanon's NNA reported a series of Israeli strikes across the south yesterday.

The attacks come a day after at least five people were killed in Israeli strikes according to Lebanese authorities, including Lebanese troops, one of them a general.

Yesterday, the Israeli military issued an evacuation warning for most of Tyre and its surroundings.

The coastal city shelters thousands of displaced people and has been heavily bombed since Hezbollah drew Lebanon into the Middle East war in support of Iran on March 2.

Civil defence teams evacuated around 500 families from schools that had been converted into shelters and transferred them to the city's Christian quarter, which was not included in the warning, an AFP correspondent reported.

Near Sidon, a bit further north, three members of the same family and a rescue worker killed in an Israeli airstrike were buried yesterday.

At least 131 rescuers have been killed by Israel in this war, according to Lebanon's health ministry.

"We do not carry rockets, our only weapon is the bread we deliver to people. They went and gave the family bread, but as they were leaving, a drone struck them," rescuer Qassem Foani told AFP.

Israel's extensive campaign of airstrikes and a ground invasion have killed more than 3,600 people, according to Lebanon's health ministry. – AFP

Trump says won't unfreeze Iran assets before deal

WASHINGTON – US President Donald Trump said in an interview broadcast yesterday that he will not unfreeze Iranian assets before reaching an agreement with Tehran.

Asked whether he would be willing, as part of a potential agreement, to unfreeze Iranian assets or lift certain sanctions against Iran, Trump replied: "No."

"[That] comes after. If they behave, if they do a good job, we

start talking," he said in the interview with NBC, recorded on Friday.

Iran has demanded that billions of US dollars in frozen assets be unblocked.

According to a source close to the matter, the US Treasury is considering the possibility that Iran's assets could be tapped to compensate Gulf states for damage caused by Iranian strikes.

Trump reiterated that he knows exactly where the enriched uranium is located in Iran and wants to

recover it one way or another, while remaining vague about whether he would send in US troops to do so.

"If we make a deal, if we make a deal now we're friendly, we'll all go together" to recover this uranium, he said. "We'll take it out and destroy it."

The fate of the enriched uranium is one of the most difficult points in reaching an agreement to end the war waged by the United States and Israel against Iran. – AFP

Israel military opens probe into West Bank baby's killing

JERUSALEM – The Israeli military said yesterday it has opened an investigation into the killing of a seven-month-old infant by Israeli gunfire in the occupied West Bank.

Sam Fahd Abou Haikal died and his parents sustained light injuries when Israeli forces opened fire on the family's car in the city of Hebron, according to Palestinian sources.

Shortly after Friday's incident, the military said its forces had fired after "soldiers perceived a vehicle accelerating toward them".

However, an initial inquiry

found the three Palestinians were "uninvolved civilians".

Yesterday, the military said it was opening an investigation into the incident.

"Based on the findings of the preliminary examination, it was decided to open an investigation by the Military Police Criminal Investigation Division," the military said in a statement.

"Upon its conclusion, the findings will be transferred to the Military Advocate General's Office."

Since the war in Gaza broke out in October 2023 with Hamas's attack

on Israel, near-daily violence has also rocked the West Bank, which Israel has occupied since 1967.

Israeli soldiers or settlers have killed at least 1,080 Palestinians since then, including both militants and civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Palestinian health ministry data.

Official Israeli figures show that at least 46 Israelis, both civilians and soldiers, have been killed in Palestinian attacks or during Israeli military operations in the same period. – AFP

Jordan sentences man to death for killing anti-drug agents

AMMAN, Jordan – A Jordanian court sentenced a citizen to death by hanging yesterday after he was convicted of killing three drug enforcement agents during a raid earlier this year.

The Jordanian state security court said, in a statement, that it "unanimously issued its final ruling on Sunday in the case concerning the martyrdom of three members of the anti-narcotics administration".

It said the accused was found guilty of charges including "physically assaulting officials charged with enforcing the narcotics law, resulting in death... and consequently sentenced him to the most severe punishment, which is the death penalty".

Jordan still sentences people to death, but there has been an effective moratorium on capital punishment for years.

The last executions in the kingdom were in 2017, when 15 people were hanged, 10 of them over terror-related charges.

The case dates back to March

18, when three members of the anti-narcotics unit were killed and a fourth was wounded during a raid that resulted in the arrest of the suspect and the seizure of weapons and drugs, according to the Jordanian public security directorate.

Jordanian authorities regularly announce the seizure and destruction of drug shipments, with 85 percent of the drugs seized intended for smuggling out of the kingdom.

Last year, authorities arrested more than 38,000 people in over 25,000 cases related to drug use, smuggling and trafficking.

Similarly, the Jordanian military regularly announces that it has thwarted drug smuggling operations across the long, porous border with Syria, particularly involving captagon pills.

Production and smuggling of the amphetamine-like narcotic were rife during the rule of ousted Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, following the outbreak of the civil war there in 2011.

– AFP

Luxury sector seeks to recover its cachet

Marie-Morgane Le Moël

PARIS – Faced with a painful slowdown in recent years, the luxury sector is seeking to recover its mojo by juggling a back-to-basics approach with finding new ways to connect to clients.

The financial performances of the heavyweights – profits amputated last year at LVMH and Kering, while Burberry posted a loss for its 2024-2025 financial year – testify to the fact the market has undergone a change.

The causes are multiple, including the slowing Chinese market, aspirational customers becoming more cost-conscious, and concerns about quality.

“Following the COVID pandemic the luxury market was boosted by binge buying,” said Eric Briones, a cofounder of the Paris School of Luxury who recently published a book about the transformation of the sector.

“And when the luxury sector was confronted with that strong demand, the artisanal model came under pressure,” he said, pointing to recent outsourcing scandals in Italy.

Luxury overexposed

A major part of the luxury cachet is that products are made with superior materials by skilled artisans using traditional methods, which naturally limits production.

Italian police have been investigating major luxury brands for two years over work allegedly outsourced to poorly paid Chinese workers and grim labour conditions.

The post-COVID-19 boom in demand was accompanied by price hikes of up to 50 percent for some labels, “without improvements in quality, and sometimes a drop in quality”, Briones said.

Not only prices increased. Volumes did too.

“It is a fundamental question,” said Christophe Cais, chief executive at CXG, a consultancy that works with premium and luxury brands about customer experiences.

“How many bags can you sell globally without becoming overexposed? Exclusivity is desirable and at the same time you want sales volume, so at what point does volume undermine exclusivity?” he said.

According to the consultancy Bain & Company, the luxury market lost 20 million clients between 2024 and 2025, after having lost 50 million over the previous two years.

Consolidation

Following years of economic and geographic growth for the big luxury groups, analysts say the time has come to prune.

“A phase of recentring and bringing some coherence to portfolios is underway,” said Lea Hubsch at Kearney.

“That may include stepping back or finding another partner for certain brands that aren’t so much part of the DNA” of a group, she added.

LVMH, the world’s largest luxury conglomerate, recently sold off US label Marc Jacobs after holding it for three decades.

In January, it sold the DFS duty free shops’ activities in China.

Kering, another luxury group based in France that is undergoing a major shakeup, sold off its beauty division to L’Oreal for four billion euros (US\$4.7 billion)

“This consolidation trend is sure to continue as conglomerates clean out underperforming or strategically less important divisions, focusing on core operations,” CXG said in a recent report.

That will provide opportunities for other companies to snap brands and create new combinations.

Italy’s Versace bought its home turf rival Prada last year for 1.25 billion euros.

Other deals are expected: Giorgio Armani indicated in his will that he wanted his fashion house to eventually join a luxury group like LVMH or L’Oreal.

Desirability, quality, experiences

Kering’s new CEO Luca de Meo was quite clear in his presentation of the group’s turnaround strategy last month that consolidation was coming, but he also signalled a back-to-basics approach.

He called for an upgrade in quality and efforts to restore the desirability of its leading brand Gucci, which fell victim to overexposure thanks to streetwear.

“Our priority is to make Gucci unmissable again,” de Meo said.

“In one second, you must know it’s Gucci – and it doesn’t mean covering the world with GG.”*

Analysts say that in addition to returning to an emphasis on craftsmanship and quality, the industry is tuning into demand for experiences and tap into the wellness trend with customer service that rivals that of luxury hotels.

“Desire has shifted to ‘experiences’: beauty, hospitality, transformative luxury,” Briones said. – AFP

*In the fashion world, GG stands for Guccio Gucci, the founder of the luxury Italian fashion house. – Gemini

Starmer will be ‘part of’ any leadership race: UK deputy PM

LONDON – British Prime Minister Keir Starmer will stand if a leadership contest is triggered, a senior minister said yesterday, after media reported Starmer had contacted key backers insisting he would run in any race.

This came after popular northern mayor Any Burnham, who is standing in a key by-election this month, said earlier this month he would participate in any leadership race, although none has yet been triggered.

Starmer “has been absolutely clear – were there to be a contest – you need 81 signatures [of MPs] to launch a contest – he will be part of that contest,” Deputy Prime Minister David Lammy told Sky News yesterday.

The prime minister would automatically be included in any leadership ballot if he wanted to participate.

The BBC and *The Sun* newspaper reported yesterday, citing unnamed MPs, that Starmer has been calling key supporters this past weekend to say that if there is a contest he would “fight it”.

The Sun reported: “Sir Keir has hardened his position and is hellbent on running against Mr Burnham.”

Labour veteran Burnham is standing to become an MP again in a June 18 vote in Makerfield in northwestern England. If elected, he would be able to take part in a leadership contest.



Britain’s Prime Minister Keir Starmer delivers a speech as he visits defence contractor STARK in Swindon, southwest England, on Friday. – AFP

Burnham said on a BBC talkshow on Thursday that he would seek to challenge Starmer if he won the by-election and if a race is triggered.

He said former health minister Wes Streeting, who resigned last month with an open letter expressing no confidence in Starmer, “seems to have launched a leadership contest. So if that is running, I would seek to join it.”

The prime minister has repeatedly rejected calls to resign and insisted he wants to stay on as leader of the Labour party after winning a general election in 2024.

Starmer told LBC radio station on Friday “I’m not going to walk away”, adding he did not want to “plunge our country into the chaos of a leadership fight”. – AFP

New aid shipment from Mexico arrives in Cuba

Havana, Cuba

HAVANA – A new shipment of humanitarian aid from Mexico arrived in Cuba yesterday, as the island faces a mounting crisis amid the US blockade on oil imports.

The shipment – the sixth from Mexico since February – arrived in Havana’s harbour yesterday morning, AFP journalists witnessed.

The United States launched its de

facto fuel blockade in late January, deepening the island’s energy crisis and pummelling its already struggling economy.

Only one Russian oil tanker has been authorised to dock since then, with fuel shortages leading to power outages of up to 22 hours a day.

The United Nations representative on the island warned on Thursday that the

humanitarian emergency, coupled with the onset of the Caribbean hurricane season, made for an “explosive cocktail.”

While the United States has had an embargo on Cuba for decades, US President Donald Trump has drastically ramped up pressure on the country and openly muses about taking it over.

– AFP

Spanish victim groups say not invited to meet pope

MADRID – Several associations representing victims of sexual abuse by Catholic clergy have complained about not being invited to a meeting with Pope Leo XIV reportedly due to take place in Madrid today.

The Vatican has said only that there will be a meeting during the pope’s visit to Spain, adding that it would not give further information until after the meeting out of “respect for the victims”.

But Spanish media said it would take place this afternoon (local time) at the Vatican embassy in the Spanish capital, formally known as the apostolic nunciature.

“Not being invited is a blow,” Juan Cuatrecasas, spokesman for the association Infancia Robada (“Stolen Childhood”), told AFP yesterday.

“I think we deserve a leading role.

We have for many years been one of the associations leading the way” in denouncing child abuse, he said.

Miguel Hurtado, a victim, said on Radio4 that the meeting was “strictly controlled by the Catholic hierarchy so that it doesn’t look bad and does not affect the figure of the pope and the message they want to convey”.

Hurtado has said he was abused by a priest at the age of 16 in the Abbey of Montserrat in Barcelona.

The pope is scheduled to visit the abbey later in his visit and Hurtado said he would face protests there.

Cuatrecasas said the meeting with the pope would be attended by victims assisted by the Repara project of the archdiocese of Madrid, which in his view means that “the reality the Pope will see is a completely skewed reality”.

On the flight that brought him to Madrid on Saturday, Leo XIV said that abuse was “still an open wound” for the Church.

After welcoming him to Madrid, King Felipe VI hailed Leo’s “clarity and firmness” on the issue, adding that this was “essential in the process of healing and reparation for the damage inflicted”.

Spain’s national ombudsman said in a report published in 2023 that since 1940 more than 200,000 minors may have suffered assaults by Catholic clergy.

Spain’s left-wing government and the Church signed an agreement in March to compensate victims of sexual crimes, after years of reluctance and opacity on the part of the Church hierarchy.

– AFP

Over 1.2 million people attend Pope's Mass in Madrid

Dario Thuburn

MADRID – More than 1.2 million people filled the streets of Madrid yesterday for Mass by Pope Leo XIV at which he called for a renewal of the Catholic faith in Spain.

King Felipe VI and Queen Letizia joined throngs of devotees waving Spanish and Vatican flags in Plaza de Cibeles (Cibele Square*) for a service filled with religious symbolism.

In his homily, Pope Leo said Spaniards should not look at religion as “a museum of the past to be visited, but a school of faith from which to draw even today”.

The Mass came on day two of Pope Leo's seven-day visit to Spain, a traditional Catholic bastion where religious observance has been declining sharply in recent years as in much of western Europe.

A huge logistical and security operation was in place for the event, after which the pope led a traditional procession along a route lined with white and yellow carnations – the Vatican flag colours.

Organisers said there were more than 1.2

million people attending in the square and the surrounding area.

Nico Aldeanueva, 28, who was visiting from Philadelphia in the United States, said the pope was “a very unifying force in a moment where we have division across so many different fronts”.

“We have, it seems like, never-ending conflict and for the time being here you get to hit pause and get to enjoy the moment and feel the faith.”

Ana Milagros, 64, who was waving a Vatican flag, said she thought the US-born pope seemed “approachable” and “very sincere”.

“There is a lot of polarisation and differences in politics, in social matters, in the economy,” she said, adding: “The pope is trying with this visit... to help all of us.”

Focus on migration

Around 56 percent of Spaniards identify as Catholic compared to 90 percent in the 1970s, according to a survey last month by the Centre for Sociological Research, an



Pope Leo XIV holds a Mass in the Plaza de Cibeles in Madrid yesterday. – AFP

autonomous government body.

On Saturday, 500,000 mostly young attendees congregated with Leo outside Real Madrid's Bernabeu stadium for a prayer vigil that stretched into the night.

Leo kicked off his visit with pomp and ceremony at a reception in Madrid's royal palace, where he called for an end to “polarising

narratives” and “sterile simplifications”.

The pope also praised Spain, whose left-wing government has sparred with his native United States as well as Israel over wars in the Middle East, for its “active commitment to peace and solidarity among peoples”.

Leo is due to visit Barcelona tomorrow and on Wednesday, where he will notably bless the Sagrada Familia (“Holy Family”) basilica's recently completed tower, which made it the world's tallest church.

His trip will end with a focus on migration on Thursday and Friday in the Canary Islands, a key destination for irregular arrivals, with thousands dying in the Atlantic Ocean trying to reach them. – AFP

**In ancient Hellenic and Roman mythology, Cybele was revered as the “Mother of the Gods” (Magna Mater). She is traditionally depicted wearing a mural crown (a crown shaped like city walls) to signify her role as a protector of cities, and she is almost always accompanied by lions or seated in a chariot drawn by them. – Gemini*

Bolivian Congress gives president power to use troops against protests



Anti-government demonstrators clash with police officers and civilians during an operation to clear a road blockade in San Julián, Bolivia, on Saturday. – AFP

José Arturo Cárdenas

LAS PAZ – Bolivia's legislature gave the green light yesterday for President Rodrigo Paz to use the military to clear roadblocks that have crippled key cities for weeks.

A month of heated demonstrations calling for the centre-right Paz to step down have paralysed the Andean nation, with blockades causing severe food and medicine shortages.

Endless lines at the pump have also led many to sleep in the vehicles to not lose their place.

A bill relaxing the country's strict rules surrounding states of emergency passed the lower chamber following 15 hours of overnight debate, the body's president, Roberto Castro, announced.

Having already passed the Senate, it heads to Paz's desk for signature.

The new law came a day after dozens of riot police backed by military vehicles fired tear gas as they attempted to clear a road in the town of San Julián.

The town is in the Santa Cruz region – an agricultural breadbasket supplying food to the country's western areas.

Protesters threw stones and burned tires to try to halt the police's advance, according to an AFP reporter at the scene.

Paz yesterday wrote on X that that the capital La Paz and second city El Alto are “still facing difficult times, but concrete progress is also beginning to be made,” including on fuel distribution.

The US-backed, pro-business Paz took office in November promising to resolve the country's worst economic crisis in decades,

but his unpopular economic reforms and failure to respond to social demands have roused public ire.

Legal liability

He has repeatedly called for dialogue with the protesters but on Wednesday proposed the legislation passed yesterday seeking to amend the country's state of emergency laws.

The new rules would allow troops to use force against protesters, and grants them a “presumption of legality” in situations of conflict.

The issue of legal liability for the military was one of the most heated debates.

The new protections are “not only necessary, but also useful – very useful – so that there are police and military personnel who, in the face of violence that is destroying our rights... are willing to protect us,” said ruling party lawmaker Carlos Alarcón.

The military thus far has had limited involvement in clearing roadblocks, playing a supporting role to the riot police.

On Friday, US President Donald Trump's new Shield of the Americas alliance – an anti-drug cartel coalition that includes pro-US administrations in Argentina, Bolivia and Chile among other countries – gave Paz its unequivocal backing.

“We stand with Paz's democratic government as it fights back against attempts to drag Bolivia backwards through cynical efforts to prevent the delivery of food, medicine and other vital supplies to the Bolivian people through fake road blockades,” the alliance members said in a statement. – AFP

Brazil's delivery riders emerge as unpredictable political force

Louis Genot

RIO DE JANEIRO – Clad in Bermuda shorts and flip-flops, João Paulo Teixeira zips through traffic on his electric scooter to deliver a meal in downtown Rio de Janeiro.

The 20-year-old Brazilian belongs to a booming new professional class of delivery workers – precarious by nature but increasingly organised in defence of their rights.

It is also a group being increasingly courted as an October presidential election draws near.

“Deliveries are like crack. I can't go without them. It's my only source of income. When I'm not working, I think about how much I'd be earning if I were out riding,” Teixeira told AFP.

And ride he does – for over 10 hours a day, six days a week, stringing together as many deliveries as possible to earn between 700 and 1,000 reais a week (US\$135 to US\$197).

That is significantly more than the monthly minimum wage of 1,621 reais in Brazil – a nation of 213 million inhabitants where the unemployment rate is low, but the informal sector accounts for a large share of the workforce.

In April, Teixeira took part in a day of major protests against a bill aimed at regulating the activities of delivery and ride-hailing drivers working through digital platforms. Protesters argue that the minimum income set in the law for each trip is way too low.

Thousands of these workers took to the streets in major Brazilian cities, prompting lawmakers to indefinitely postpone consideration of the bill.

‘Massive boom’

According to the latest available official data, Brazil had 274,000 app-based delivery workers in 2024 – but experts say this number is significantly underestimated.

“This professional group has experienced a massive boom since the pandemic. It is highly sought after, not only because of the sheer number of delivery workers but also due to their capacity for collective action,” Nicolas Souza Santos, co-founder of the National Alliance of App-Based Delivery Workers (ANEA), told AFP.

In October, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva will seek a fourth non-consecutive term in office at the age of 80. He is facing a tight race against Flávio Bolsonaro, the eldest son of the far-right former president Jair Bolsonaro.

Lula's government has shown support for an increase in the minimum income per trip for gig workers.

Last month, the administration also announced a series of measures aimed at delivery workers, including favourable credit terms for the purchase of motorcycles.

And both sides of the political spectrum in Congress have introduced various proposals aimed at improving conditions for the sector.

Left-wing lawmaker Taliria Petrone introduced a bill to require delivery platforms to provide a meal allowance for delivery workers – “people who bring food to others, yet often go hungry themselves.”

On the conservative side, congressman Daniel Agrobom has established a parliamentary front dedicated to defending the interests of delivery workers and ride-share drivers.

“They want autonomy and freedom, and that is what we are fighting for,” he asserts, while also expressing support for regulation “to ensure they can work safely and receive fair compensation.”

Ricardo Festi, from the Institute of Social Sciences at the University of Brasília, noted that the political “left, which has always been embedded within the formal sector through labour unions, struggles more to engage with precarious workers.”

‘Unrepresented by politicians’

Leticia Birchall Domingues, a professor of political science at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, said that in Brazil there was a “strong consolidation of people on the right and on the left, with well-defined profiles.”

However, gig workers like delivery riders were a more “ambiguous” category, and their votes are seen as up for grabs, she noted.

Paulo Almeida, a 36-year-old rider, voted for Jair Bolsonaro in the last presidential election, but he is unsure whether he will vote for Flávio this October.

“I still don't know which side will be most favourable to me,” said the former driving instructor, who began making deliveries by bicycle two years ago in order to “earn a little extra money while having more free time.”

Guilherme Matias, 23, says he now earns double the salary he made when he worked as a waiter.

He took part in the April protests but feels “unrepresented by politicians, who only look out for themselves.” – AFP

'It's clear who won!': Mexican zoo residents hedge World Cup bets



GUADALAJARA, Mexico – Two elephants trudged across a makeshift football field at Mexico's Guadalajara Zoo in a whacky attempt to predict the score of the 2026 World Cup's opening game.

The creatures faced a prophetic choice: munch on the grass on the side marked with a Mexican flag, or opt for the greenery on the opposing South African side.

Their split-second choice to amble over to the former consolidated the prediction that Mexico will emerge as the winner of the highly anticipated match on June 11.

This fortune-telling exercise follows in the footsteps of South Africa's unforgettable Paul the Octopus in 2010.

"The idea is that the animals are going to make predictions about different matches that will be played," zookeeper Ivan Reynoso told AFP.

Next up, the gorillas Chenchi and Faustina were presented with two pinatas shaped like player jerseys - one from Spain, and the other from Uruguay.

There was a tense pause until one of the primates suddenly went for Uruguay's shirt, suggesting the South American nation will win the June 26 match.

"It's clear who won!" one zookeeper exclaimed excitedly.

A puma named Muluk seemed sure that South Korea will triumph against the Czech Republic, and six giraffes hedged their bets with the Democratic Republic of Congo over Colombia.

Reynoso said the betting "stimulates many senses" for the animals on top of providing entertainment for an audience giddy with excitement ahead of the world's biggest football bonanza.

"This kind of activity enriches them a great deal, not only visually for the audience but for them as well," he said. – AFP

Photo on page 16

FIFA to allow disposable water bottles at World Cup games after outcry

LOS ANGELES – FIFA said Friday it will allow fans to bring one "soft, plastic" disposable water bottle into World Cup venues after its ban on refillable bottles sparked an outcry.

"All fans will be permitted to bring in one, soft, plastic 20 ounces (590ml), factory sealed disposable water bottle into any FIFA World Cup 2026 match in the USA and Canada," World Cup chief operating officer Heimo Schirgi, said in a video posted on FIFA's X account.

The announcement, which FIFA called a "clarification" of its water bottle policy, came two days after FIFA said that refillable water bottles wouldn't be allowed.

That was a change to their official stadium code of conduct that could force thirsty supporters to pay for bottled water.

FIFA justified the move on safety grounds, "to prevent risk and injury to players and attendees.

"Outside bottles are already prohibited at several of these venues for safety considerations, and FIFA is applying this consideration across its tournament stadiums," FIFA said in a statement to AFP.

On Friday, FIFA said that those concerns remain valid.

Schirgi said that "fans will not be permitted to take in hard sided, reusable water bottles due to safety and security reasons," showing examples of bottles that will and won't be allowed.

Forecasters have warned that fans could face health risks from extreme heat at open-air venues during the World Cup, which is being co-hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico.

A report published by the World Weather Attribution research group last month estimated that 26 of 104 games at the World Cup are likely to be played in conditions where the Wet Bulb Global Temperature (WBGT) exceeds 26 degrees.

WBGT is a measure of heat stress on the human body which combines temperature, humidity, wind and sunlight.

At last year's FIFA Club World Cup in the United States, where fans complained of searing temperatures, supporters were also barred from taking water bottles into venues.

FIFA has noted that misting stations, fans, hydration stations and cooling tents would be available in "the stadium footprint".

Bottled water inside the venue will be sold at prices which "remain consistent with other events held at each stadium," FIFA says. – AFP

Iran's World Cup team blast US visa row on arrival in Mexico

Eduardo Jaramillo



TIJUANA, Mexico – Iran's World Cup squad landed in Mexico yesterday under the shadow of a bitter diplomatic row, after the United States - in open military conflict with Tehran - refused to issue visas for some team support staff.

Iran coach Amir Ghalenoei complained on arrival at Tijuana airport that "we should have been here last week because a 12-hour time difference needs two weeks of adjusting."

He added: "Usually in these tournaments, before technical matters, ethical and human considerations must be respected - which I think for us it was not the case."

The dispute erupted just days before Thursday's kick-off of the 2026 World Cup, which is being jointly hosted by the United States, Mexico and Canada.

After departing from their training camp in Turkey a day earlier, the Iran team landed around 5:00 a.m. [local time] yesterday in the Mexican border city of Tijuana, AFP journalists there witnessed.

The squad and their coaching staff left their plane amid tight security which included a contingent of Mexican national guard troops. Just a handful of fans waving Iranian flags were present at the airport to welcome them from a distance.

The Iranian team will be based in Tijuana throughout the tournament, despite playing their entire group stage in the United States - two games in Los Angeles and another in Seattle as they tackle New Zealand, Belgium and Egypt in Group G on June 15, 21 and 26.

When they do play in the US, it will be the first World Cup to see a host nation receive the team of a country it is at war with.

'Upset'

Ghalenoei thanked FIFA for its efforts to help secure entry, but said "we are upset about this behaviour. It has certainly never happened before."

Team captain Ehsan Hajsafi said he wanted to convey his grievance to FIFA about the delay in getting US visas. "Why so late?" he demanded.

Hajsafi stressed the difficult backdrop for the team's participation, as "in the last year, we experienced two imposed wars in our country."

But he stated "the team is 100 percent ready" and believed "we can advance" in its group matches."



Iran's captain and defender Ehsan Haji Safi speaks with the press on arrival at the Tijuana International Airport in Tijuana, Mexico yesterday, ahead of the FIFA 2026 World Cup football tournament. – AFP

Another player, Alireza Jahanbakhsh, said the team's condition was "positive" after a good training camp. "We are surely doing all we can to prepare for the first game against New Zealand."

Iran's team spent nearly three weeks at the training camp in Turkey, using their time there to apply for visas to travel to Mexico, Canada and the United States.

On the eve of their departure for Mexico, the players finally received their US visas, Washington's envoy to Turkey Tom Barrack said on X late Friday.

But Iran's embassy to Turkey said support staff had been denied visas - 15 administrative and management staff are concerned, an Iranian diplomat and state TV said.

The embassy slammed what it called "deliberate and discriminatory treatment against Iran's national football team" and called for FIFA "to hold the US accountable for violations of its rules."

Adding to the tensions, Iran's ambassador to Mexico said Saturday the squad had been notified that, under their visa conditions, the team must enter and leave US soil on the same day as their matches.

"We can enter in the morning and we must leave the same day," Iran's envoy Abolfazl Pasandideh told reporters.

That appeared to contradict what the team's spokesman Amir Mahdi Alavi told state TV earlier.

"The visas issued for the national team are multiple-entry visas, and the national team will arrive at the match venue one day before the first game and, for the following games, two days prior to each match," Alavi said.

FIFA rules for World Cups stipulate that a team's coach must give a news conference on the eve of the match at the venue where the game will be played.

US wary of 'terrorists'

Iran's Football Federation - whose chief Mehdi Taj was reportedly among those denied a visa - has described the decision as "political interference in sport in its worst form."

A US administration official did not directly address the matter of those whose visas were refused, saying only: "We will not allow the Iranian team to abuse this system to sneak terrorists into the United States under false pretences."

In April, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said any problem would not be with the Iranian players but "some of the other people (they) would want to bring with them," suggesting some had ties to the Revolutionary Guards, a group on the US terror blacklist.

Taj himself is a former Guards member, Iranian media in the diaspora have reported.

Daniel Mercado, working at a taqueria eatery near the heavily-guarded Tijuana hotel hosting Iran's team said he regretted the politicisation of the sport.

"They shouldn't mix football and politics - they are two very different things," insisted the 38-year-old.

The Middle East war erupted when the United States and Israel started bombing Iran on February 28.

An April 8 ceasefire, which largely halted the fighting, has come under strain from recent exchanges of fire.

– AFP



South Korea players jog during a training session at the Verde Valle training ground in Zapopan, Jalisco state, Mexico, on Saturday, ahead of the FIFA 2026 World Cup football tournament. – AFP

Zverev ends wait for Grand Slam title with French Open triumph

Jed Court

PARIS – Alexander Zverev finally secured his maiden Grand Slam title with a dramatic five-set victory over Italy's Flavio Cobolli in the French Open final yesterday.

The second seed became the first German man to win a major tournament since Boris Becker at the 1996 Australian Open with a 6-1, 4-6, 6-4, 6-7 (5/7), 6-1 win after four hours and 16 minutes on Court Philippe Chatrier.

It was Zverev's fourth Grand Slam final and second at Roland Garros after some heartbreaking near misses in his career.

Cobolli, the 10th seed, was bidding to become the first Italian man to win the French Open in 50 years.

The 24-year-old had never even played a Slam semi-final before, let alone a final, after his last-four opponent Matteo Arnaldi withdrew from the tournament through illness.

Both players appeared to struggle with nerves at various points in the match, especially Cobolli during an error-strewn first set.

But Zverev's greater experience showed in a deciding set that was far tenser than the scoreline suggested, as he managed to get over the line.

The 29-year-old was handed a golden opportunity to break his Grand Slam duck by the injury-enforced absence of reigning champion Carlos Alcaraz and surprise early exits for Jannik Sinner and Novak Djokovic.

The world number three was not always in control, making 54 unforced errors, but did enough to finally shed the tag of being one of the best players to have never won a major.

Zverev had previously also lost in six Slam quarter-finals and seven semi-finals, alongside his three final defeats.

The most agonising miss of all was his first major final when he blew a two-set lead and failed to serve for the championship against Dominic Thiem at the 2020 US Open.



Winner Germany's Alexander Zverev (right) is embraced by Italy's Flavio Cobolli at the end of their single's final singles at the French Open tennis tournament on Court Philippe-Chatrier at the Roland-Garros Complex in Paris yesterday. – AFP

The now-retired Thiem was watching on from the stands at Roland Garros as Zverev belatedly put the memories of that match to bed six years later.

Cobolli's nervy start

Cobolli made a nervy start and appeared to be struggling to deal with the occasion as the first set quickly got away from him in 39 minutes, making 16 unforced errors.

He managed to settle into the match with three successive holds of serve in the second set and then made his move out of nowhere to break in the seventh game.

Zverev had been completely untroubled on serve previously, but produced a scrappy game featuring two double-faults and a wild forehand on break point before turning to gesticulate angrily towards his coaching staff.

Cobolli started to grow in confidence and served out the set to breathe life into the final.

A higher-quality third set disappeared from Cobolli's grasp in the 10th game, though, as from 30-0 up, he lost four

points in a row, including a poor forehand that flew well wide on set point.

The world number 14, who will climb into the top 10 for the first time next week, hit straight back with a break in the opening game of the fourth set.

He could not pull away in the set, though, as both players ended up being broken twice, including Cobolli when he served for it at 5-4.

But the Italian rallied himself to push it into a tie-break, which he took to force a decider with a blistering forehand winner on his second set point.

Following a delay before the start of the final act after Cobolli left the court, Zverev struck first blood with a break in the first game.

Cobolli's hopes were finally all but extinguished when he missed a break-back point and then dropped serve again to slip 3-0 down.

Zverev staved off three more break points in the fourth game and eased to victory from there, falling to the clay in celebration after Cobolli shanked an overhead on his second match point. – AFP

Antonelli wins 5th straight in interrupted Monaco Grand Prix

F1

Tim Collings

MONTE CARLO – Teenager Kimi Antonelli extended his lead in the drivers' world championship with a commanding and nerveless victory for Mercedes ahead of Ferrari's Lewis Hamilton in a protracted, incident-hit Monaco Grand Prix yesterday.

It was the 19-year-old Italian's record fifth consecutive victory this season, making him the first Italian to achieve that feat since Alberto Ascari in 1952. It hoisted him 66 points clear of Hamilton in the title race.

"The car was a peach today," he said after becoming the youngest winner of Formula One's classic blue riband event.

"An incredible day – one of those when we had incredible pace to give me confidence to push."

In a stoppage-strewn race punctuated by crashes, retirements and a series of penalties, Antonelli came home 6.271 seconds clear of seven-time champion Hamilton with Red Bull's Isack Hadjar third ahead of Oscar Piastri of McLaren.

Racing Bulls' Liam Lawson and Arvid Lindblad finished a career-best fifth and

sixth respectively, while Sergio Perez in 10th scored the new Cadillac team's first point.

Hamilton equalled Ayrton Senna's record total of eight Monaco podiums.

Four-time champion Max Verstappen of Red Bull suffered an engine failure at the start and retired, as did world champion Lando Norris when his McLaren had battery problems.

Antonelli made a perfect getaway. Behind him, Verstappen had a power failure as he attempted to start.

"What can I do?" asked Verstappen. "Just bring it home," came the Red Bull reply. His problem was diagnosed as engine failure. It was his eighth first-lap retirement.

For Antonelli, the youngest-ever pole sitter in Monaco, his dream start enabled a run in clear air to establish a lead of 5.4 seconds by lap 10.

Norris had a lap one setback when, after squabbling with Piastri for sixth, he was passed by Pierre Gasly on the outside of St Devote.

In the first round of pit stops, Hamilton was one of several drivers given a five-second penalty for speeding in the pit-lane.

After revelling in his supremacy, Antonelli came in a second time after

37 laps, easily retaining his lead before Norris's problems ended with a call to retire on lap 46.

The young Italian was racing with such ease that race engineer Peter Bonington told him: "Kimi, fastest lap! No, we don't need them."

'No rear brakes'

On lap 60, Lance Stroll smacked the barriers at Antony Noghes to prompt a safety car.

The race re-started on lap 66 and, as Antonelli pulled clear with Hamilton in pursuit, the luckless Leclerc crashed at the same spot.

"I'm not taking the blame for that," he said. "It's like I had no rear brakes at all."

That lifted Hadjar into third place before a second red flag suspended the action, with the field called back to wait in the pit lane as the track was repaired and Russell was given a drive-through penalty for failing to serve an earlier time penalty correctly.

After a 40-minute hiatus, the action resumed from a standing start.

Antonelli held his nerve to lead again with Hamilton second ahead of Russell, who promptly pitted for his penalty and fell to 14th. – AFP

Marc Marquez wins Hungarian MotoGP for weekend sweep

MotoGP

BALATONFOKAJAR, Hungary – Reigning world champion Marc Marquez won on a Sunday for the first time this season as he held off young Spanish compatriot Pedro Acosta to take the Hungarian MotoGP.

Francesco Bagnaia finished a distant third while the top two in the standings, Aprilia pair Marco Bezzecchi and Jorge Martin, crashed out on the first corner.

In a battle of the generations, 33-year-old Marquez, who also won Saturday's sprint, and Acosta, 22, exchanged the lead a couple of times before the veteran pulled away in the closing laps.

Marquez beat Acosta by just over 1.343 seconds. It was the veteran's 100th victory across all categories, and Ducati's 100th win in the sport.

"I'm super happy," said Marquez who rushed back after undergoing surgery on his right shoulder and a broken foot after a crash at the French Grand Prix in early May.

"The price was expensive, but happy to have another comeback."

The 4.8km Balaton Park circuit, which hosted its first MotoGP last year, is narrow, twisty, and not conducive to overtaking. Most riders do not like it, but Marc Marquez feels right at home. Last year, the Spaniard swept the board taking pole position, sprint race, fastest lap, and overall victory.

An additional advantage for Marquez is that Balaton Park is one of the six circuits this season that run counter-clockwise. The Spaniard has always preferred left-hand corners but they were even more helpful this weekend because he was nursing his right shoulder.

"I don't know if I'll have chances like this again in the upcoming races. I wasn't feeling great on Friday, but I made a good step forward on Saturday," he said.

Bagnaia finished 11.632 seconds behind Marquez on a matching factory Ducati, a ride that Acosta, who is with KTM, is widely expected to take over next season.

At the start, bikes tumbled like bowling pins going into at the first corner.

Martin, who is second in the standings, locked up coming out of the short starting straight, lost control and he, and his bike, flew into the tightly-bunched pack hitting Bezzecchi. Fermin Aldeguer of Ducati Gresini, Raul Fernandez of Trackhouse and Fabio di Giannantonio on a VR46 Ducati also went down.

Bagnaia said he saw Martin coming out of the corner of his eye.

"When I started to break, I just saw something arriving so fast, and it was Martin arriving at double speed."

"Maybe he was too inside and locked the front, because the new tarmac on corner one was very slippery."

'Really good battle'

Di Giannantonio remounted and collected four points as he trailed in 12th.

Marquez had sped off from pole position and was already clear of the chaos behind him. Only Acosta, who narrowly outpaced the wave of crashing bikes, was able to give chase and quickly closed and shot past.

By halfway, the leading pair had pulled six seconds clear of Bagnaia

Marquez overtook on lap 14 and held off 22-year-old Acosta's instant counter-attack pulling clear before relaxing in the final lap.

"We tried everything, it was a really good battle, I hope that everyone at home enjoyed it," said Acosta who is still chasing his first MotoGP victory. "The pace was good, qualifying again was good. Back-to-back podiums, I'm quite happy."

Ai Ogura on a Trackhouse was fourth and Luca Marini fifth for Honda.

Bezzecchi, Martin and Di Giannantonio stayed in the first three places in the standings. Acosta jumped to fourth and Marquez into fifth. – AFP

US gamers getting older as industry reports growth



Gamers play Mario Kart World during a launch event ahead of the midnight release of the Nintendo Switch 2 at the Nintendo New York store on June 4, 2025. — AFP

Alex Pigman

WASHINGTON, DC — Video games are having a moment in the United States — but the players are getting older.

The average video game player in the US is now 37 years old — up from 29 about two decades ago — as the industry reports activity climbing back to their highest levels since the COVID-19 pandemic-era boom, a new report reveals.

The findings, from the Entertainment Software Association's annual Essential Facts report, challenge enduring stereotypes about who plays games while underscoring the industry's recovery from a post-pandemic slowdown.

"It mirrors in large part the demographics of the nation," ESA president and chief executive Stanley Pierre-Louis told AFP recently, noting that more than half of all players in the United States are now 35 or older.

The steadily rising average player age reflects both the aging of a generation that grew up with consoles and a wave of older adults who have since picked up the hobby.

The gender split also defies the stereotypical image of the young male gamer.

Men account for 53 percent of players and women 46 percent, with women actually outnumbering men among Baby Boomers, the ESA said.

Overall, 67 percent of Americans play video games for at least an hour a week — a figure broad enough to encompass everything from

blockbuster console titles to casual mobile games like Wordle.

Revenues — totalling US\$60.7 billion in 2025 — have rebounded to their highest point since 2021, when pandemic lockdowns drove an outsized surge in both players and spending.

After a pullback as COVID-19 restrictions lifted, the industry has returned to growth, Pierre-Louis said.

Self-regulation

As lawmakers in the United States and Europe weigh tougher regulations on screen time, age verification and in-game spending, Pierre-Louis argued the US gaming industry's track record of voluntary self-regulation sets it apart.

That voluntary framework, he said, has given the industry credibility with US lawmakers that social media platforms lack.

Those platforms, he noted, "traditionally didn't have the same level of parental tools that video games had" — a gap that has fuelled the regulatory backlash now engulfing companies such as Meta and TikTok.

"Safety is not a competitive issue in our industry — it's one of collaboration," Pierre-Louis said.

"Being on the ecosystem and staying on the ecosystem means you feel like you're in a trusted environment."

'Satisfaction'

The ESA was founded in 1994 partly in response to congressional concern over violent content in

games, and almost immediately established the Entertainment Software Rating Board, which assigns age ratings from E for Everyone to M for Mature for titles sold in North America.

The system also flags details about online interactions and in-game purchases.

Major console platforms including Xbox, PlayStation and Nintendo Switch now offer parental control tools that allow families to restrict what games children can access, cap spending and limit screen time — capabilities Pierre-Louis said have been refined over decades in direct response to parent and policymaker feedback.

The argument, however, faces increasing pushback in the United States.

The gaming industry is facing growing scrutiny as platforms expand into social media-like features, with ESA member Roblox especially under pressure over child safety issues with regulators and in courts.

Legislative proposals range from mandatory age verification for games with chat features to bills that would impose national safety standards.

For the industry, such legislation should not be necessary.

"It's a matter of how do we get everyone up to speed on what the video game industry has been doing, so that there's satisfaction around the practices and trust and safety mechanisms we have in place," Pierre-Louis said. — AFP

Video game makers shift releases to avoid 'GTA VI' juggernaut

PARIS — Video game publishers are reshuffling release schedules to avoid getting run over by feverishly anticipated "Grand Theft Auto VI", as a crowded autumn line-up takes shape, industry players said at an annual gaming event on Friday.

The Summer Games Fest in Los Angeles highlighted dozens of upcoming titles while underscoring the market impact of Rockstar Games' next instalment, due on November 19 after two delays.

GTA VI is the eighth main entry in the blockbuster franchise, and set to arrive more than 13 years after GTA V, the second best-selling video game in history.

Publishers are steering clear of the final months of 2026, traditionally a peak sales period, to avoid competing with what is expected to be the year's dominant product — and potentially the biggest entertainment launch of all time.

Titles including "Wolverine", "Silent Hill: Townfall" and "Ace Combat 8: Wings of Theve" are among more than a dozen major games expected in September, while "Star Wars Zero Company" is set for August 27.

"Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 4" will launch on October 23, just weeks before GTA VI — a slot

widely seen as the outer limit for avoiding direct competition.

That window is "frequently cited as the latest you can release a game and not get sucked into that Rockstar black hole", said Christopher Dring, founder of specialist outlet The Game Business.

GTA VI will be the "biggest premium release which will gather huge amount of attention and engagement that will likely last until at least the new year", consultancy firm Ampere Analysis said in a report.

The Summer Games Fest, hosted by Geoff Keighley after conferences led by Sony and ahead of Microsoft's showcase, unveiled several major titles on Friday, including "Final Fantasy VII Revelation", due in spring 2027.

A remake of "Resident Evil: Code Veronica", first released in 2000, is also slated for 2027, titled "Resident Evil Veronica", reflecting the industry's continued reliance on established franchises.

Beyond release schedules, the event showcased new projects, including "1666 Amsterdam" by Assassin's Creed creator Patrice Desilets and "Gen Atlas" from Japanese designer Fumito Ueda.

— AFP

Kanye West draws crowd in Netherlands despite antisemitic tirades

Eva Van Dam

ARNHEM — Tens of thousands of fans flocked to see US rapper Kanye West perform in the Netherlands on Saturday, despite controversy over his antisemitic tirades that have prompted the cancellation of several European concerts.

West sparked widespread outrage with comments glorifying Nazi leader Adolf Hitler, a song titled "Heil Hitler" and the sale of T-shirts bearing a swastika on his website.

Outside the GelreDome stadium in the eastern city of Arnhem, where 40,000 attended the concert, fans told AFP they wanted to separate the music from the controversial reputation of the 48-year-old artist, known as Ye.

"I'm not supporting all of those things he said, like it's really controversial," said Loes Snyers, a 20-year-old Belgian student.

"But for me, I really don't care about the backlash of all the bad stuff artists do, I really focus on the music."

The rapper has denied being antisemitic and distanced himself from his remarks on social media, attributing them to his bipolar disorder.



US rapper Ye performs on stage at the GelreDome venue in Arnhem, eastern Netherlands, on Saturday. — AFP

Near the concert venue, the Jewish organisation CIDI held a small protest against the artist, displaying antisemitic quotations from the rapper on placards.

"I know that his fans are probably coming for the music, but we cannot look away [from] the Jew-hatred that he has spread widely in the past," said the CIDI's director, Naomi Mestrum.

The organisation sought to have the concert cancelled but an Amsterdam court ruled the shows did not pose a threat to public order.

Ye's concerts have been scrapped in the United Kingdom, France, Poland and Italy.

"We are not happy with the fact that he gets such a huge stage here in the Netherlands, where other countries around us have drawn a moral line and rejected him," said Mestrum.

"If you really want to make amends, you have to [make] more than just an apology on Twitter."

Ye is due to perform in the Albanian capital Tirana on Thursday and in Prague on July 25. — AFP

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 16°C~29°C	Manila 25°C~32°C	New York 14°C~25°C	Lisbon 15°C~25°C
Shanghai 19°C~26°C	Bangkok 26°C~35°C	London 9°C~17°C	Rio de Janeiro 16°C~25°C
Hong Kong 25°C~30°C	Tokyo 18°C~24°C	Frankfurt 13°C~25°C	Luanda 22°C~25°C
Taipei 24°C~31°C	Singapore 25°C~32°C	Vancouver 12°C~18°C	Maputo 13°C~27°C
Guangzhou 23°C~30°C	Kuala Lumpur 24°C~33°C	Paris 9°C~21°C	Dili 20°C~31°C
Nanjing 17°C~23°C	Jakarta 24°C~34°C	Moscow 16°C~27°C	São Tomé 24°C~33°C
Guilin 18°C~23°C	Seoul 14°C~27°C	Las Vegas 21°C~35°C	Praia 20°C~29°C
Xi'an 15°C~28°C	Sydney 11°C~19°C	Monte Carlo 17°C~25°C	Bissau 25°C~34°C



1. Lives up to its name!

The Flying Scotsman steam locomotive travels along the East Lancashire Railway's line past Burrs Country Park, near Bury in northern England on Friday. The Flying Scotsman was built in 1923 and holds the record for becoming the first steam locomotive to be officially authenticated at reaching 100 miles per hour on November 30, 1934. Following a £4.2 million refurbishment, the Flying Scotsman returned to the UK's mainline in 2016. The East Lancashire Railway runs a 12-mile heritage railway line between the stations of Heywood and Rawtenstall.

- AFP

2. Whatever! It's yummy!

A Lowland gorilla plays during an environmental enrichment activity, predicting the outcome of the Spain vs. Uruguay FIFA World Cup football match, with Uruguay winning, at the Guadalajara Zoo in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico, on Friday.

- AFP

3. Proud angels

Revellers take part in the 30th LGBT Pride Parade in Sao Paulo, Brazil, yesterday.

- AFP



4. Deep Time

People visit the Vivid Sydney light festival in Sydney, Australia, on Saturday. The annual Vivid Sydney light festival is held here from May 22 to June 13 this year.

- Xinhua

5. Starting young

A child takes part with Thai, Malaysian and foreign nationals in the Yakang Floating Market Night Run 2026 in Narathiwat, Thailand on Friday.

- AFP

6. Ancient & modern

People gather in front of the illuminated "Sunflower Angel," a nine-metre-tall fibreglass art installation by local artist Arrofi Ramadhan, at Prambanan Temple - a UNESCO World Heritage-listed 9th-century Hindu temple complex - in Sleman, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, on Saturday.

- AFP

